Aviation Elite Units

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# USAS 1st Pursuit Group

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Series editor Tony Holmes

**Front Cover**

**On 7 May 1918, three Pfalz D IIIas of Royal Württemberg *Jagdstaffel* 64w were patrolling over Vieville-en-Haye during a visit from King Friedrich August III of Saxony when they encountered three Nieuport 28s of the 94th Aero Squadron USAS, led by Capt James Norman Hall. The Germans fired first, but the Americans had the height advantage and dived on them. During the fight, either 1Lts Edward V Rickenbacker or M Edwin Green got in a shot that wounded Ltn Wilhelm Scheerer in the stomach, and he crash-landed east of Vieville.**

**Meanwhile, Ltn Friedrich Hengst managed to shake Hall off with a sharp turn, got on his tail and followed the American as he went into a dive. At that juncture Hall's upper wing fabric tore away and a 37 mm shell from one of M Flak 54's guns smashed his motor. Hall crashed, breaking his nose and right ankle – his demise was credited to Ltn Hengst. While awaiting transport to Landshut prison, Hall learned from his *Jasta* 64w 'hosts' that Willi Scheerer had died of his wounds a few hours after being shot down.**

**After Hall's release on 16 November 1918, his report confirmed the victory, which belatedly raised Rickenbacker's total to 26, thus reaffirming his status as the American 'ace of aces' (*Cover artwork by Mark Postlethwaite*)**

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EDITOR'S NOTE

To make this best-selling series as authoritative as possible, the Editor would be interested in hearing from any individual who may have relevant photographs, documentation or first-hand experiences relating to the world's elite pilots, and their aircraft, of the various theatres of war. Any material used will be credited to its original source. Please write to Tony Holmes via e-mail at: tony.holmes@zen.co.uk

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# FIRST IN MANY WAYS

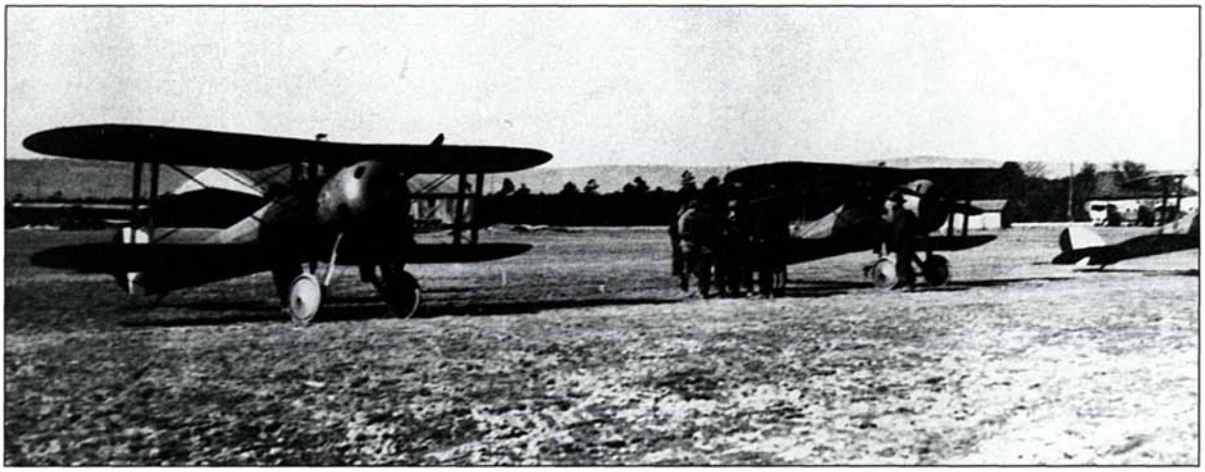
Declaring war on Germany on 6 April 1917, the United States was a late arrival in World War 1, but by mid-1918 the soldiers and airmen of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) were playing a significant role in stopping the last major enemy offensive of the war, and in the final Allied push that would end the conflict.

Although the US Army Air Service (USAS) never succeeded in fielding an indigenously designed aeroplane before the Armistice on 11 November 1918, it assembled a sizeable force using aircraft bought – or in the case of the de Havilland DH 4, built under licence – from its French and British allies. During the USAS' relatively short time in combat, several of its squadrons and men managed to acquire a renown worthy of their allies and adversaries.

Arguably the most notable collection of American aerial paladins was the 1st Pursuit Group, made up of the 27th, 94th, 95th, 147th and, in the war's final month, 185th Aero Squadrons. Among other things, the group produced the first American trained fighter pilot to score an aerial victory and later become an ace, the highest-ranking American ace, the highest-scoring American balloon ace, and the first USAS member – indeed, two members – to earn the Medal of Honor. It also ended the conflict with the highest tally of aerial successes in the AEF, the last one of which was also the final American fighter victory of the war.

Amid general preparations to train and ship USAS airmen overseas, on 16 January 1918 Maj Bert M Atkinson, Capt Philip J Roosevelt, Capt John G Rankin, six sergeants first class and one civilian employee were assigned to the 1st Pursuit Organization Center at the French aerodrome at Villeneuve-des-Vertus. On 2 February construction began on barracks, hangars and other facilities for what was now designated the 1st Pursuit Group, whose initial aircraft complement would be 36 Nieuport 28 fighters purchased from France.

**Early members of the 95th Aero Squadron. They are, from left to right, 1Lts Charles H Woolley, Edward P Curtis, John L Mitchell and Alexander H McLanahan (*Jon Guttman*)**

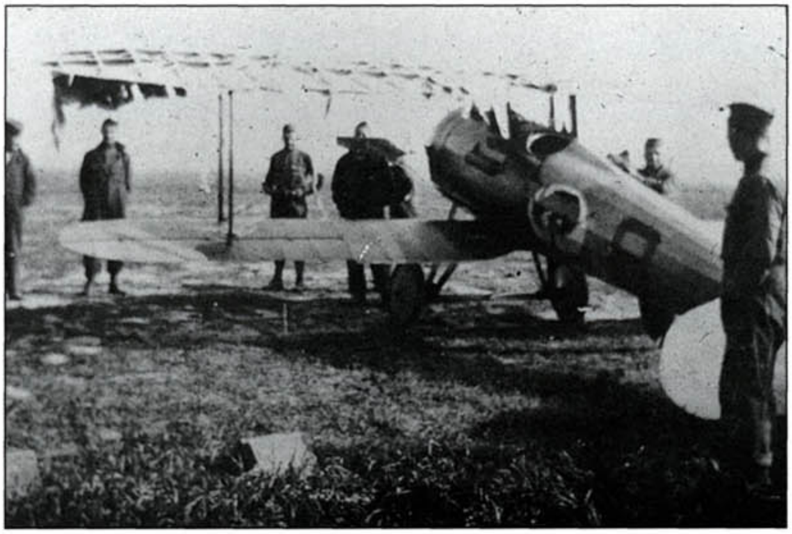


The first Nieuport 28s delivered to the 95th – still in French national markings, and lacking machine guns – line up for inspection at Villeneuve-des-Vertus aerodrome on 8 March 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

Built in the late summer of 1917, the 28.C1 departed from previous Nieuport sesquiplane designs in having a true biplane structure with two-spar wings in order to accommodate more powerful engines such as the 160 hp Gnome monosoupape 9N rotary. It was also more heavily armed than its predecessors, with twin 0.30-calibre synchronised Vickers machine guns. The French government had awarded the new fighter a production contract, but cancelled the order shortly thereafter because the *Aéronautique Militaire* was too committed to the SPAD XIII, with its sturdier airframe and 220 hp Hispano-Suiza 8B engine.

The United States was also interested in procuring SPAD XIIIs, but the initial priorities placed on equipping French *escadrilles* led the USAS to order 297 Nieuports in order to provide its pilots with a reasonably effective fighter until the SPADs became available. In consequence, the 1st Pursuit Group added to its distinctions that of being the only unit to use the Nieuport 28 in combat.

The Americans soon found the Nieuport to be a mixed blessing. Among the most elegant looking aeroplanes of the war, it performed well, with a maximum speed of 128 mph, and was highly manoeuvrable. Due to shoddy quality control, however, a poor grade of glue was used in the fighter's construction, and this in turn led to an alarming number of incidents in which the wing fabric tore away.



Mechanics of the 95th Aero Squadron look over 1Lt Waldo Heinrichs' Nieuport 28 N6160 'No 8', which suffered the loss of its upper wing fabric – a disturbingly frequent occurrence on the American Nieuports – on 2 June 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

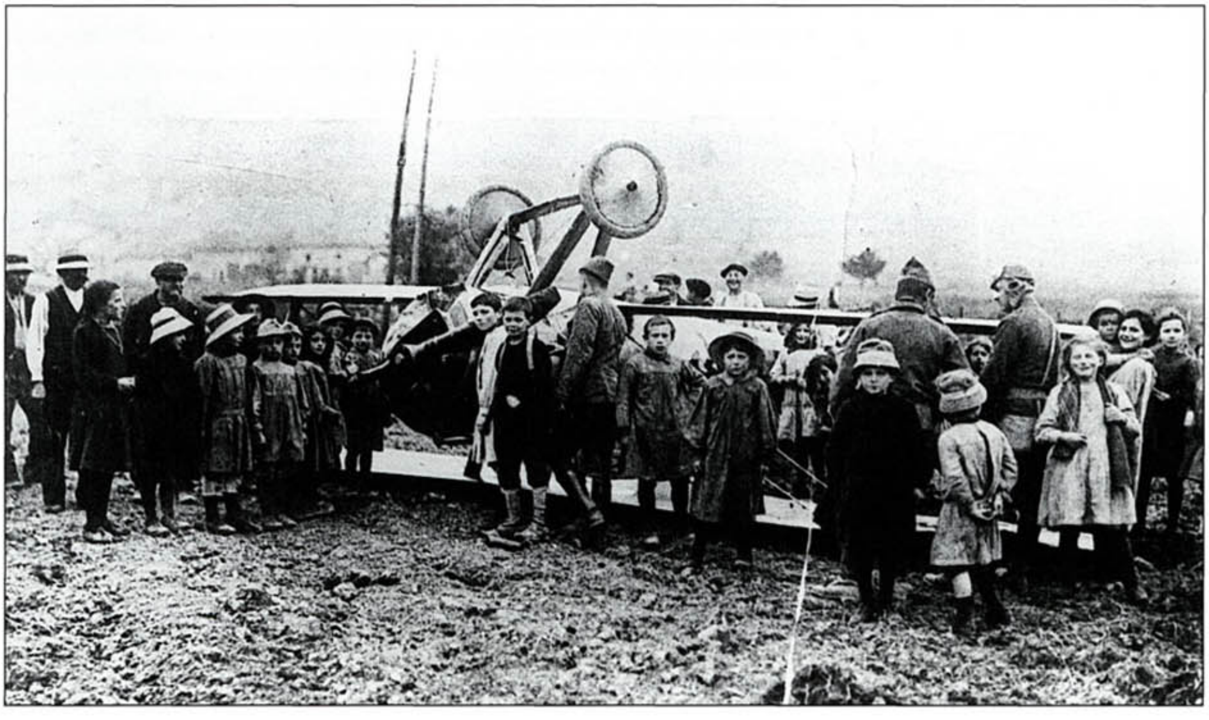
Another problem lay in the single-valve Gnome monosoupape engine, which required a 'blip switch' to slow down by cutting the ignition in some of the cylinders. During that time fuel leaked from the valves and accumulated under the cowling, often bursting into flame when ignition was restored to all cylinders. On top of all that, engine vibrations often caused its rigid and improperly annealed copper-tube fuel lines to crack.

Meanwhile, the squadrons slated to use the Nieuports were reaching the front. Organised at Kelly Field, Texas, on 20 August 1917, the 94th Aero Squadron had arrived at Le Havre on 13 November, and after two months of technical training, it was transferred to the 3rd Aviation Instruction Center (AIC) at Issoudun for flight training. By that time the 27th and 147th Aero Squadrons were forming back in the US, and the 95th Aero Squadron was already in France, its commanding officer as of 28 January 1918 being Maj Gervais Raoul Lufbery.

Although he was a former member of France's famed American volunteer *escadrille* SPA124 *Lafayette*, and held the twin distinctions of being the first and the highest scoring American ace at the time, Lufbery proved to be an awkward fit in the AEF. Amid the transition of SPA124 personnel to the USAS, Lufbery had initially been assigned to the AIC, where he was expected to write books on combat tactics. 'Luf', however, was a man of action, not words – spoken or written – and so he obtained a reassignment to the 95th Aero Squadron, where he could give its pilots more hands-on instruction. Lufbery's relatively lax attitude toward the AEF's 'by the book' discipline soon led to his being replaced as CO of the 95th by Capt James E Miller.

On 16 February the 95th departed Issoudun aboard a train whose cars, previously used to transport horses and mules, had not been cleaned. The day was so cold and raw that the squadron personnel built fires on the floor of their cars, both for warmth and to dispose of the litter. Upon their arrival at Châlons-sur-Marne the next day, the 95th's pilots got their first

**A forced landing by a 95th Aero Squadron Nieuport attracts a lot of local attention (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



Maj John Huffer (left), commander of the 94th Aero Squadron, chats with his operations officer, Maj Gervais Raoul Lufbery, beside a Nieuport 28. Huffer was a veteran of the LFC, with three victories to his name, while 'Luf' had scored 16 with the famous *escadrille* SPA124 *Lafayette* (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

taste of war when a nocturnal German air raid damaged some of their equipment, but caused no casualties.

On 18 February Lufbery joined the 95th at Villeneuve-des-Vertus as its training officer. On 5 March the 94th, under Capt Henry L Lyster, arrived, and Lufbery shared his combat savvy with pilots of both units. On the 7th Lyster was replaced as the 94th's CO by Maj John W F M Huffer, a former member of the Lafayette Flying Corps (LFC) with experience in *escadrilles* N95 and N62 over the Western Front and F36 over Italy. If his fellow officers were uncertain of what to do with Lufbery, Huffer was not, requesting that he be assigned to the 94th as his operations officer. Besides Lufbery, the 94th got the benefit of three flight leaders who had previously served in the *Escadrille Lafayette* – Capts James Norman Hall, David McKelvie Peterson and Kenneth Marr.

The first Nieuport 28s were delivered to the 95th Aero Squadron at the end of February, and between 15 and 22 March its pilots ferried in 22 of them for the 94th. Neither unit received guns with its first complement of aircraft, but Lufbery, disgusted at the delays, led the 94th's first frontline patrol in unarmed aeroplanes on 6 March. His 'lucky' wingmen on this occasion were 1Lts Douglas Campbell and Edward V Rickenbacker. The 95th likewise flew an unarmed patrol on the 15th.

Born on 7 June 1896 in St Jose near San Francisco, California, and schooled at Harvard and Cornell universities, Doug Campbell typified the well-bred young collegiates who comprised most of the 1st Pursuit Group's flying personnel. Rickenbacker was more the exception. Born in Columbus, Ohio, on 8 October 1890, Edward Richenbacher was the son of Swiss immigrants who smoked at age five and left school at age 12 when his father died in order to support his family. Although he spoke with an accent, he Americanised his last name to 'Rickenbacker' and said he added the middle name 'Vernon' 'because it sounded classy'.

In 1912 he became a racing car driver and in 1914 he set a world speed record of 134 mph at Daytona, Florida. In spite of a lifelong fear of heights, Rickenbacker decided to learn to fly in 1916. By then 27, he was considered too old to join the USAS. Enlisting in the Army instead, he

Capt David McKelvie Peterson, shown here beside a 'B' Flight Nieuport, was another *Lafayette Escadrille* veteran who lent his experience to the 94th as a flight leader, and would later command the 95th (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

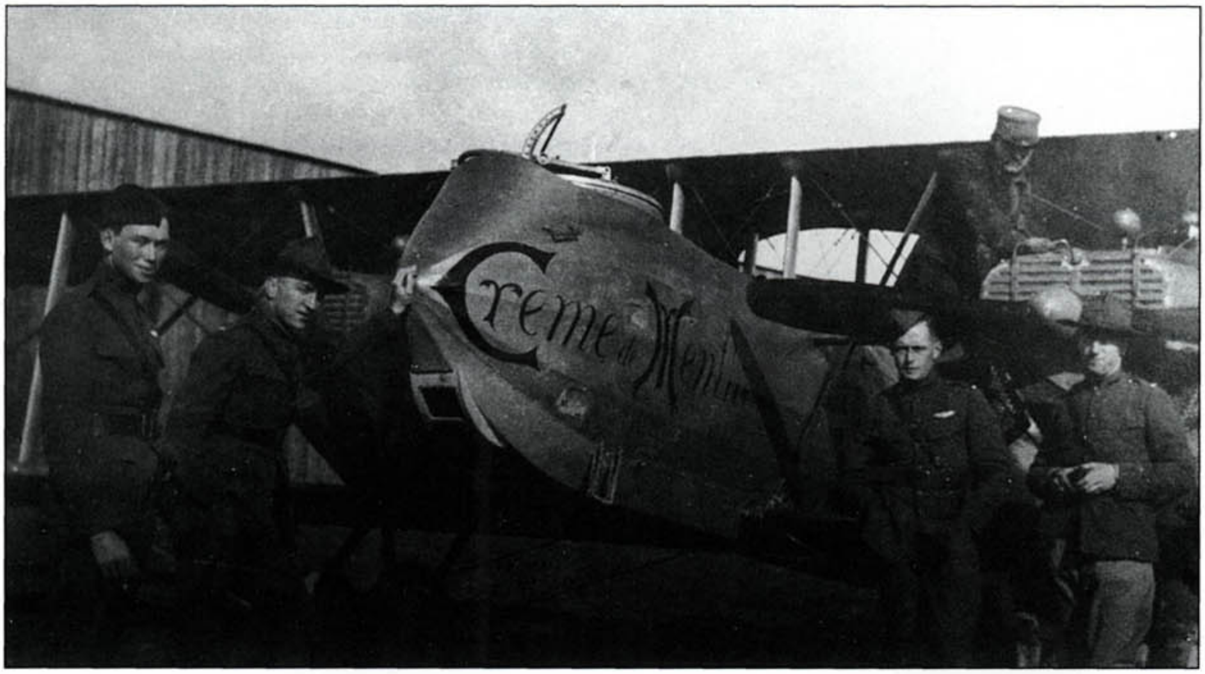
wangled a job as chauffeur to Col William Mitchell, and by pestering the colonel – and falsely claiming his age to be 25 – he got a transfer to the USAS, graduating from flight training in only 17 days.

Older, and more accustomed to using cruder language than his Ivy League squadronmates, 'Rick' was initially happier tinkering with engines than making friends at the 94th, but the worldly veteran Lufbery coached him in tactics and helped him overcome his conservative aversion to aerobatics. Both Rickenbacker and Campbell would soon show the fruits of 'Luf's' tutelage.

Even while the two squadrons were breaking in their Nieuports, the 95th suffered its first combat loss. On 9 March Capt Miller, together with Majs Davenport Johnson and Millard F Harmon, borrowed some SPAD VIIs from a French unit based at Coincy and went off seeking frontline experience.

Harmon dropped out early on with engine trouble, but Miller and Johnson carried on past Soissons and Reims, attacking two German aircraft without result and tackling two fighters at 10,500 ft 20 minutes later. Johnson, the higher of the two, reported firing 25 rounds before his guns jammed. Meanwhile, Miller's opponent spun down, then suddenly looped and got on his tail. 'I followed him down until he disappeared',

**Former racing car driver Edward V Rickenbacker poses for a photograph between training flights on the relatively docile Caudron G 3 at Tours (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



**1st Pursuit Group pilots look over a French Caudron R 11A3 at Villeneuve-des-Vertus aerodrome while waiting for their own fighters to arrive in February 1918. They are, from left to right, 1Lt Alex McLanahan of the 95th, Rickenbacker of the 94th and 1Lts Edward Buford Jnr and Herbert R Hall, also of the 95th (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

Johnson reported, 'but as my machine guns were broken I could do nothing, I so returned to Coincy, arriving at 1750 hrs.'

Miller's SPAD S3144 crashed northeast of Craonne, thus giving Ltn Robert Hildebrandt of *Jagdstaffel* 13 his first victory. The Americans were fated to have plenty more contact with *Jasta* 13 in the future.

Decades later, James C Knowles Jnr, a 21-year-old from Cincinnati, Ohio who had been a track and baseball star at Harvard University before joining the 95th, expressed bitter memories of his squadron leader's death;

'Harmon had engine trouble and turned back. Johnson and Miller ran into four Germans. Almost immediately, Johnson abandoned the fight and left Miller on his own. After the war, the German pilot who brought Miller down recalled in a signed statement that he and his intelligence officer had rushed to the crash scene, where Jim, badly wounded in the crash and obviously dying, spoke his last words, "Goddamned Johnson, he left me without warning. He's a yellow son of a bitch! You can tell him that, and I hope he's stuck up against a wall and shot".

'After that, the good Major was known as "Jam" Johnson', Knowles added. 'And to top it off, he replaced Miller as our squadron commander!'

Meanwhile, the 94th finally received machine guns – albeit only enough to mount one per aeroplane – and was able to fly its first armed patrol on 28 March, with Lufbery again leading Campbell and Rickenbacker, followed the next day by Lufbery and 1Lts Thorne C Taylor and John Wentworth.

With that, according to Rickenbacker's memoirs, the pilots felt their squadron qualified to adopt an identifying insignia as used by French units. Huffer suggested a stovepipe hat with 'Stars-and-Stripes' as worn by 'Uncle Sam' (and his own personal marking when he flew with N62). Capt Paul H Walters, the squadron surgeon, raised a cheer by proposing that since the 94th's hat was now 'in the ring', it be depicted accordingly. Wentworth, an architect in civilian life, developed the design to its definitive form.

# FIRST BLOOD

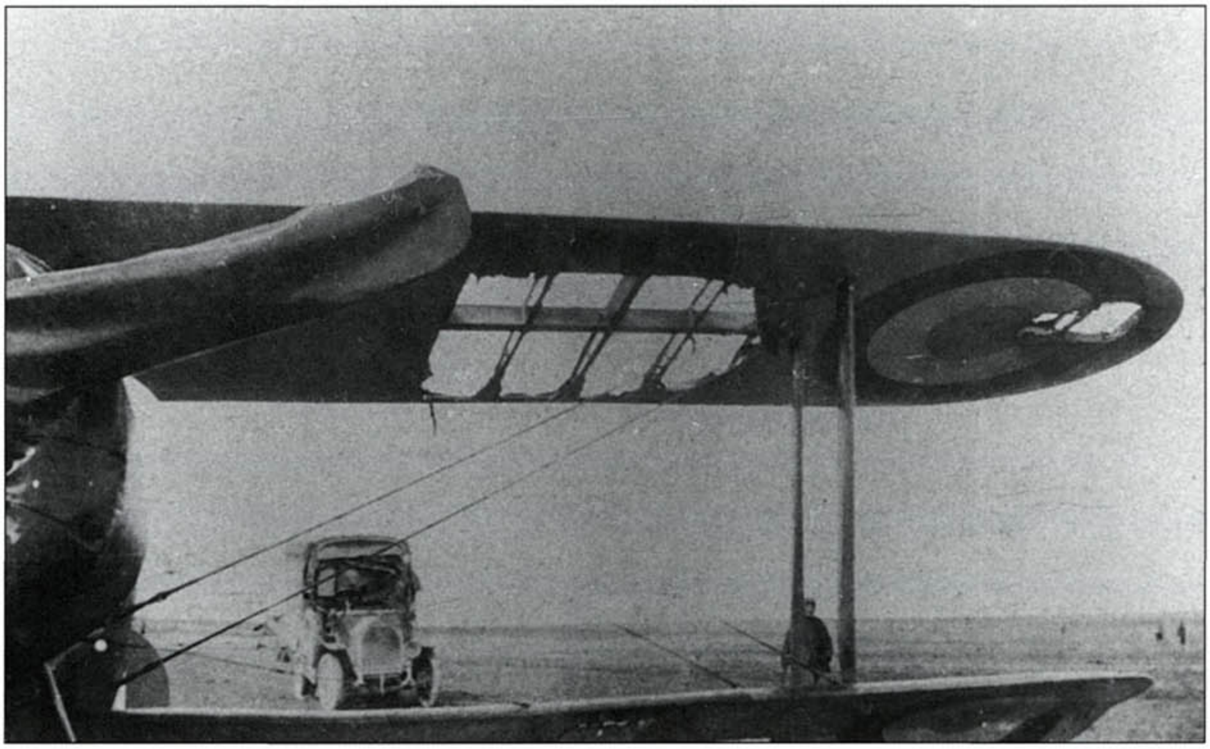
On 31 March 1918, the 1st Pursuit Group was transferred to Epiez, but the 94th Aero Squadron's departure from Villeneuve was delayed when a hangar fire that night destroyed two of its aeroplanes and damaged several others. The first patrol was flown from Epiez on 4 April, but three days later the 94th was temporarily detached from the 1st Pursuit and sent to Gengoult aerodrome, four kilometres northeast of Toul, where it would support the French VIII *Armée.*

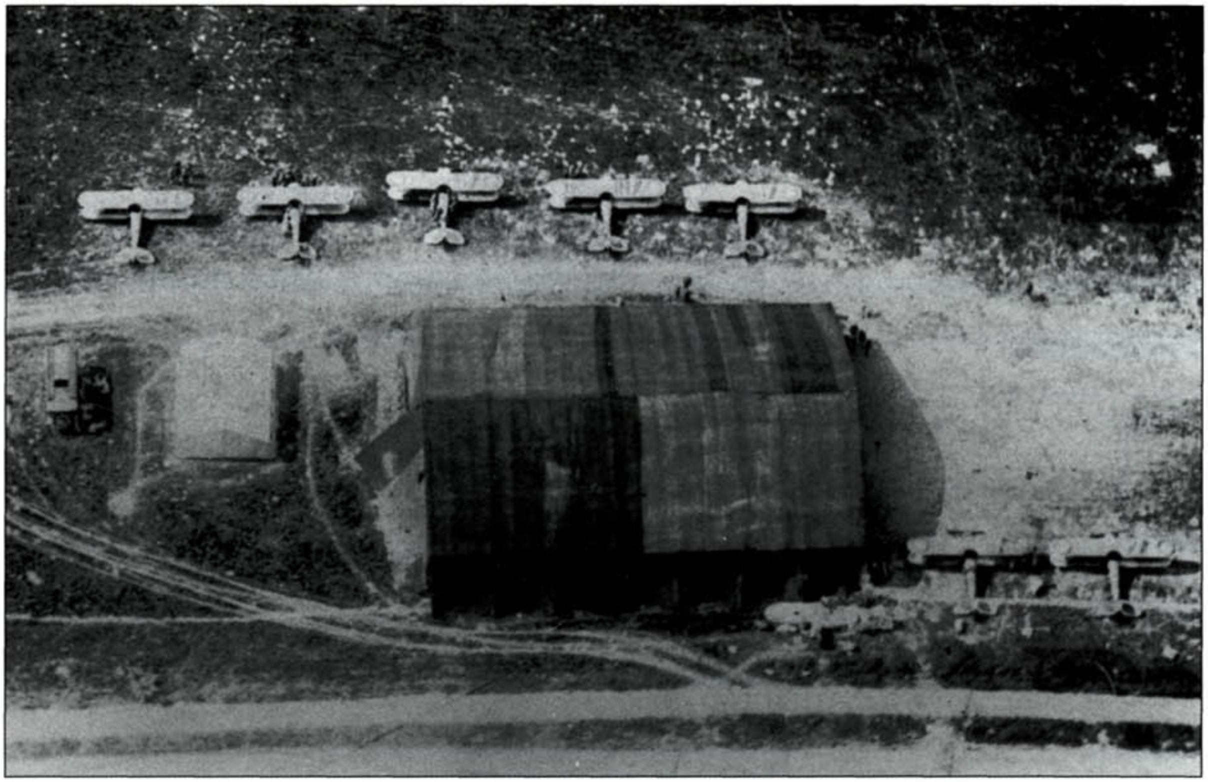
Toul lay near a wedge-shaped salient about 40 kilometres long and 30 deep centred on the city of St Mihiel, which had been occupied by the Germans since late September 1914. Defended by a formation called *Armee-Abteilung* C, the sector abutted those of the German 5. *Armee* to the northwest and *Armee-Abteilung* A in the east, and had been relatively quiescent while the great battles had raged at Verdun, the Somme and Flanders. German aerial units there consisted of a few reconnaissance *Flieger Abteilungen* (Fl Abt) and a newly formed, understrength fighter unit, Royal Württemberg *Jagdstaffel* 64, or *Jasta* 64w, which arrived at Mars la Tour aerodrome on 22 March 1918. These factors made the Toul sector a good one in which to break in the neophyte Americans.

The 94th arrived at Gengoult on 9 April, and Wentworth's 'Hat-in-the-Ring' began appearing on its Nieuports the next day. The squadron's first combat occurred on the 12th when Lufbery attacked three Albatros D Vas and claimed one that could not be confirmed.

The morning of Sunday, 14 April promised to be a dull one at Gengoult, with low clouds limiting the pilots to what seemed like little

**A Nieuport 28, still in French markings, displays damage incurred in the hangar fire at Villeneuve-des-Vertus on 31 March 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

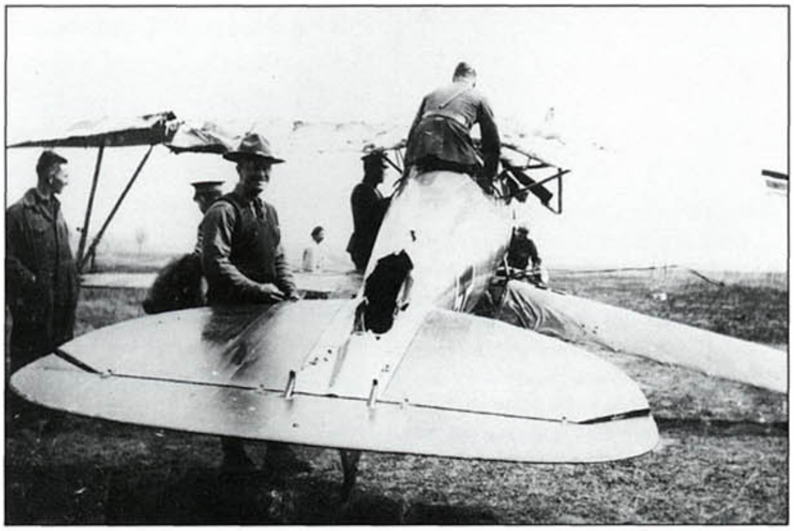




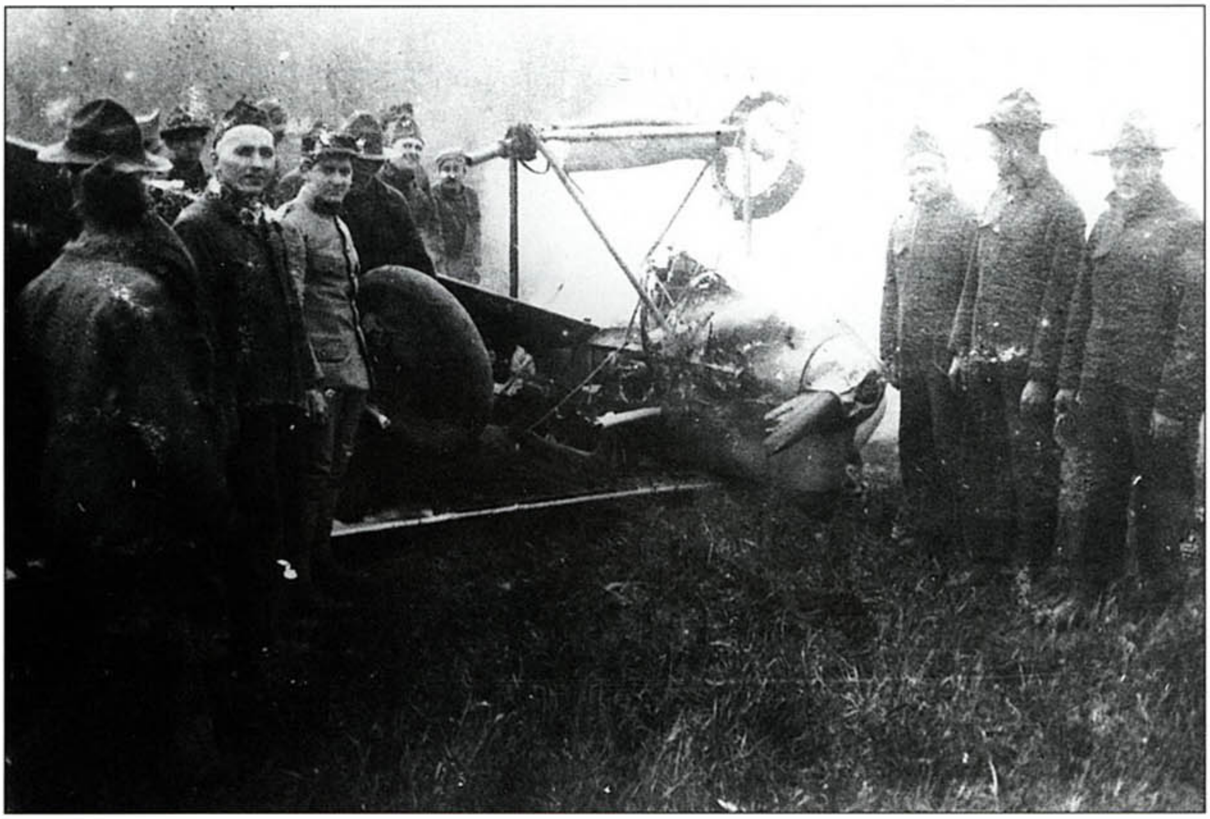
**An overhead view of Nieuports outside the 95th Aero Squadron's Hangar No 2 at Gengoult aerodrome, near Toul (*Michael Hamaty via Charles Woolley*)**

more than token alert. Then, at 0940 hrs, French observers reported two German aircraft flying south and two Nieuports scrambled, flown by Doug Campbell and 21-year-old 2Lt Alan F Winslow, who was another of the 94th's LFC veterans with previous service in *escadrille* N152.

The Americans had barely ascended to 1500 ft when alien engine sounds were heard over the field and two German fighters emerged from the clouds. After a brief dogfight, Winslow gained a position above and behind an Albatros D Va, riddled it with bullets and sent it crashing about 100 yards from the aerodrome. Ten seconds later Campbell sent his adversary (a Pfalz D IIIa) crashing in flames less than half-a-mile away on the other side of the airfield. It had taken only four minutes from take-off to chalk up the 94th's first two confirmed successes, Campbell's being the



**The Albatros D Va brought down by 2Lt Alan Winslow on 14 April 1918 displays the black and red tail bands of Royal Württemberg *Jagdstaffel* 64w. The official record may have deliberately mixed up types and their pilots to conceal the fact that one of the latter, Polish-born Vzfw Antoni Wroniecki, wished to defect to the Allied side (*Jon Guttman*)**



**American and French personnel view the wreckage of the Pfalz D IIIa allegedly shot down by 1Lt Campbell on 14 April 1918 – the first victim of an American-trained fighter pilot (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

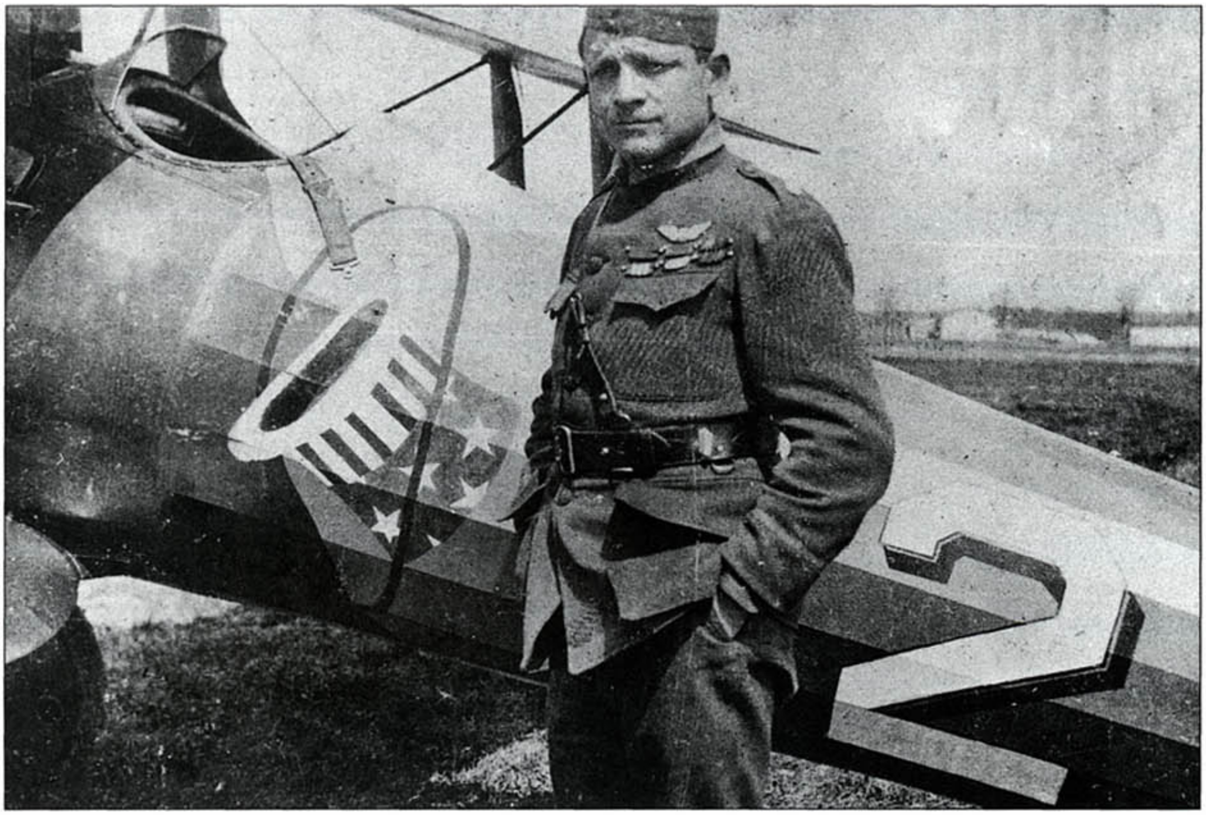
first for an American trained fighter pilot, and on 26 April the French awarded both victors the *Croix de Guerre.*

While Campbell's and Winslow's victories were clear-cut enough, there was more to their victims than met the eye. Campbell's, identified as Vzfw Antoni Wroniecki of *Jasta* 64w, was described as being 'in ghastly agony', Winslow claiming that he died soon after being rushed to the hospital. Other records, however, merely state that he was injured, with broken bones and burns. The other German, Uffz Heinrich Simon, allegedly suffered only bruises.

After accepting a cigarette, Wroniecki stated – in French, rather than German – that he was a Pole, and complained of still being a non-commissioned officer after two years' frontline service.

It has since come to light that Antoni Wroniecki had indeed hated the Germans, and harboured plans of defecting at the first opportunity in the hope of joining the Allies toward resurrecting Poland from the territories then occupied by Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. That chance came when he was ordered to lead Simon on patrol, during which he deliberately 'got lost' until their fuel was low. Wroniecki was approaching Toul when he and Simon were jumped by Campbell and Winslow. Evidently, the Allies exchanged Wroniecki's identity with Simon's so the Germans would think that he had been killed.

Assuming the pseudonym of Wroblewski (an avian play on his actual name, *'wrona'* being Polish for 'crow' and *'wrobel'* meaning 'sparrow'), Wroniecki joined a Polish volunteer unit, but was still training on French aircraft when the war ended. With the restoration of an independent Poland after the war, in 1936 he joined its intelligence service and spent some time in Berlin, spying on the Germans. In World War 2 Wroniecki

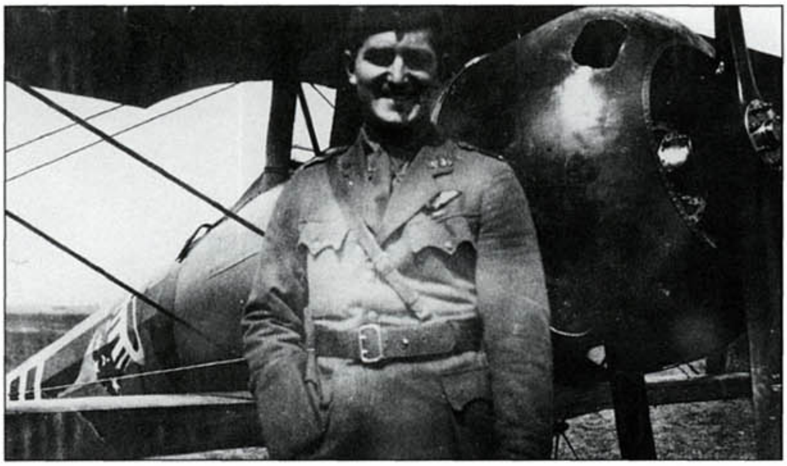


**Maj Lufbery with his Nieuport N6193 'White 2' at Gengoult. Ironically, Lufbery was flying 2Lt Philip W Davis' N6178 'Red 16' when he was killed on 19 May 1918, and Davis was in Lufbery's aeroplane when he was killed on 2 June (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

served in the Royal Air Force, dying of natural causes at the Polish RAF base in Blackpool on 31 March 1941.

With its hat now truly 'in the ring', the 94th had set a precedent that all of its pilots were keen to reprise. On the morning of 23 April, five two-seaters of Bavarian Fl Abt (A) 298 reported five having encounters with Allied fighters which sometimes chased them far behind their own lines – something the French seldom did. One aeroplane was damaged, apparently after taking five rounds from Lufbery before his gun jammed and 50 rounds from Campbell, resulting in 'smoke issuing from the German aeroplane', although the crew was unhurt.

That afternoon, Campbell reported that he 'Chased enemy aeroplane north of Thiaucourt, but did not get very close to him'. He fired 45 rounds, but his quarry, again from Fl Abt (A) 298b, escaped.



**Campbell poses before his Nieuport N6164 after the white No 10 was added to the fuselage side and wings. The aeroplane did not wear those numerals on the day of his first victory, although it did sport the 94th 'Hat-in-the-Ring' emblem and his black and red triangle motif on the cowling. This fighter was condemned on 4 May and shipped out to Colombey-les-Belles two days later (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

**1Lts Douglas Campbell, M Edwin Green and Edward V Rickenbacker of the 94th Aero Squadron clown around on the unit's Harley-Davidson motorcycle at Gengoult in April 1918 while 1Lt Alden B Sherry looks on to the right of the machine (*Jon Guttman*)**

On 29 April Hall and Rickenbacker encountered an 'Albatros monoplace' between St Baussant and Montsec. 'Capt Hall fired 350 rounds, Lt Rickenbacker fired 200 rounds', their report said. 'Enemy machine dove. Hall and Rickenbacker followed him, firing all the time. Cloud of smoke emerging from enemy's machine and continued to pour out all the way down. Lost sight of enemy at 700 metres near Vigneulles les Hattonchatel, still going down'.

A ground witness confirmed the victory, which the Americans shared, in like manner to French policy. It was Rickenbacker's first victory and the fourth for Hall, who had previously scored the *Escadrille Lafayette's* last success on New Year's Day 1918 and then twice more after it had become the 103rd Aero Squadron, USAS. Their opponent – actually a Pfalz D IIIa of *Jasta* 64w – suffered engine damage, but after diving away flew along at low altitude until forced to land between Xammes and Dampvitoux.

## TORN FABRIC

Days of rain subsided on 2 May to inaugurate a month of heavy activity over the hitherto-placid Toul sector. That morning, an aeroplane from Fl Abt (A) 298b was forced to abort its photo-reconnaissance mission by four bellicose Nieuports. One of its assailants, 2Lt Winslow, reported;

'Encountered enemy biplace at 1100 hrs over Bois de Mort Mare. Chased enemy aeroplane below 1000 metres and into Germany about six kilometres past Essey. Fired about 100 shots at enemy from long range. Bullets entered German aeroplane, but enemy kept on its course. No shots fired at me.'

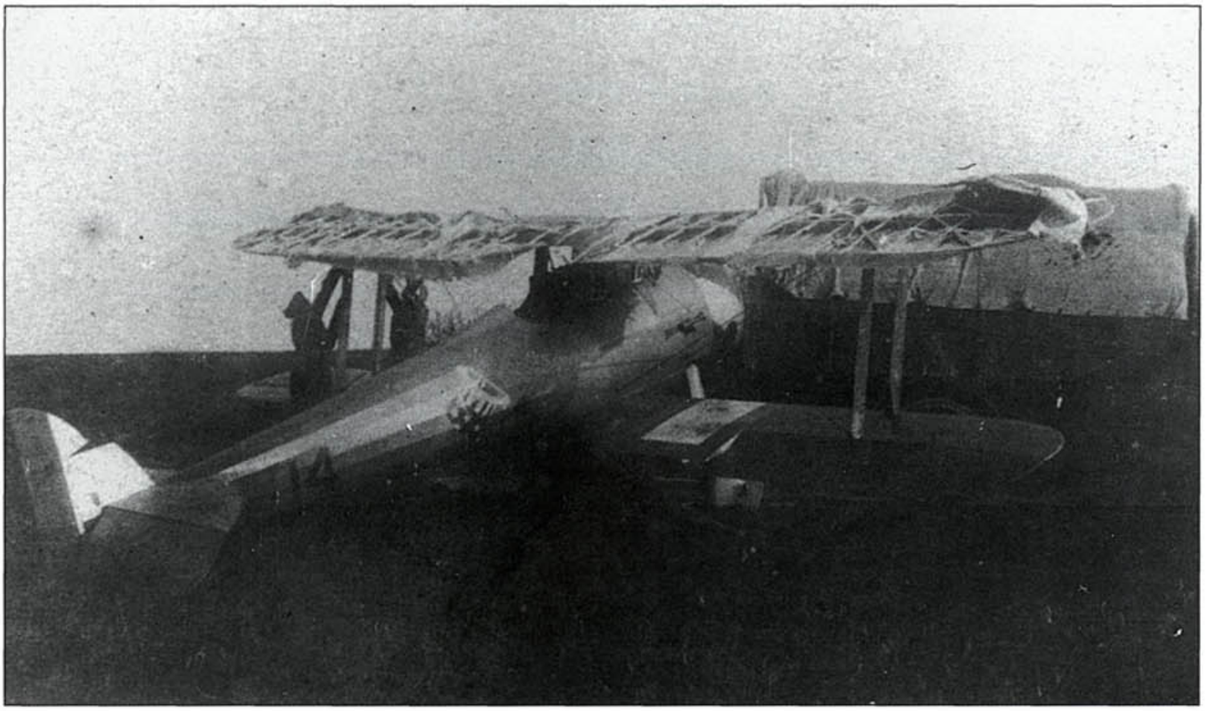
Less than an hour later 1Lt James A Meissner and 2Lt Philip W Davis were escorting a French Breguet 14A2 on a reconnaissance mission when they spotted two more aeroplanes from Fl Abt (A) 298b below them. One was a Hannover CL IIIa, a small, agile two-seater which Meissner mistook for a fighter in his report;

'Combat with monoplace Albatross at 4800 meters over Bois de la Rappe. Albatross shot down in flames at 1203 hrs. I had to land at la Ferme de Nanceville because wings were damaged in the combat.'

Photographs of Meissner's Nieuport N6144 showed 'damaged' wings to have been an understatement. Most of the fabric had torn loose as he pulled out of his dive, a piece of it, complete with USAS cockade, being found not far from where his victim fell. Meissner may have been hit by enemy fire or fragments of his victim as it exploded into flame, but an investigation eventually revealed the cheap glue that would contribute to some similar incidents later. That Meissner survived was thanks both to his skill and the fact that the Nieuport 28's ailerons were mounted on the lower wing.

Less fortunate was the Hannover crew, Ltn d R Franz Hemmerle and Hermann Neff being killed.

The 95th, whose pilots had been withdrawn for training to improve what had been judged to be inadequate gunnery skills, also flew its first combat patrols on 2 May. During this sortie Maj Johnson, leading 1Lts Richard A Blodgett, Harold R Buckley and William H Taylor Jnr, encountered an enemy two-seater. Buckley dove in first, but had to pull away when his gun jammed. Taylor and Johnson also attacked, only to disengage with stopped weapons of their own. Blodgett, now alone, dived under the German's tail, then fired up and saw the observer topple backward into the cockpit. He then set the enemy's engine smoking, but his



**Nieuport N6144 'Red 14' (formerly flown by 2Lt William Casgrain of the 95th) is seen here shortly after 1Lt James A Meissner had claimed his first victory with it on 2 May 1918. The fighter has been marked up with a red and silver lightning bolt motif on its cowling, and a Third Liberty Loan poster has been pasted onto its lower right wing. Note also how most of the fabric on the upper wing had been torn loose during Meissner's dogfight with the Hannover CL IIIa of Fl Abt (A) 298b. As with other upper wing fabric failures that blighted the Nieuport 28 in USAS service, this was caused by poor quality glue failing when the aircraft was flown aggressively (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

gun jammed as he pursued it over its lines. Blodgett returned to Epiez almost out of fuel, and upon landing his aeroplane tipped on its nose, crumpling the cowling and breaking the propeller.

Given a standing ovation as he entered the officers' mess, 'Dauntless Dick' Blodgett, as he was called thereafter, later reflected on the 95th's first, albeit unconfirmed, victory;

'I kind of feel sorry for the Germans now, but during the fight I didn't have time to think about anything but bringing the Hun aeroplane down.'

The next day saw Capt Peterson leading Campbell, 1Lt William F Loomis and 2Lts Charles W Chapman and Davis – all but Campbell being former LFC members – over the Lorraine sector, where the French VIII *Armée* faced the German 19. *Armee*. After an unsuccessful brush with a two-seater southeast of Nancy, the Americans encountered five Albatros D Vas of Bavarian *Jasta* 80 near Harbouey at 1140 hrs.

In the ensuing melée Oblt Erwin Wenig, *Jasta* 80b's commander, got a close-range burst into Chapman's Nieuport N6138, which reportedly did a front somersault, righted itself, then nose-dived with flames bursting from its fuselage and crashed between Remoncourt and Leintrey. Rushing to Chapman's aid, Peterson reported, 'I attacked enemy monoplace from close range. He dove vertically, then burst into flames and hit the ground near Amenoncourt'. The 94th had suffered its first combat loss, and while Peterson's victory was confirmed, in the confusion of the fight, and viewing its aftermath from a height of 2000 metres, he had mistaken Chapman's fiery demise for his opponent's. Wenig, in fact, returned to base unscathed to claim his second of an eventual four victories.

On 4 May the 95th Aero Squadron settled down at Gengoult. The next day the 94th was released from its VIII *Armée* assignment and formally

**Members of the 95th Aero Squadron get acquainted with 'Jake', the unit mascot, acquired soon after an Army mule was selected as their squadron insignia (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

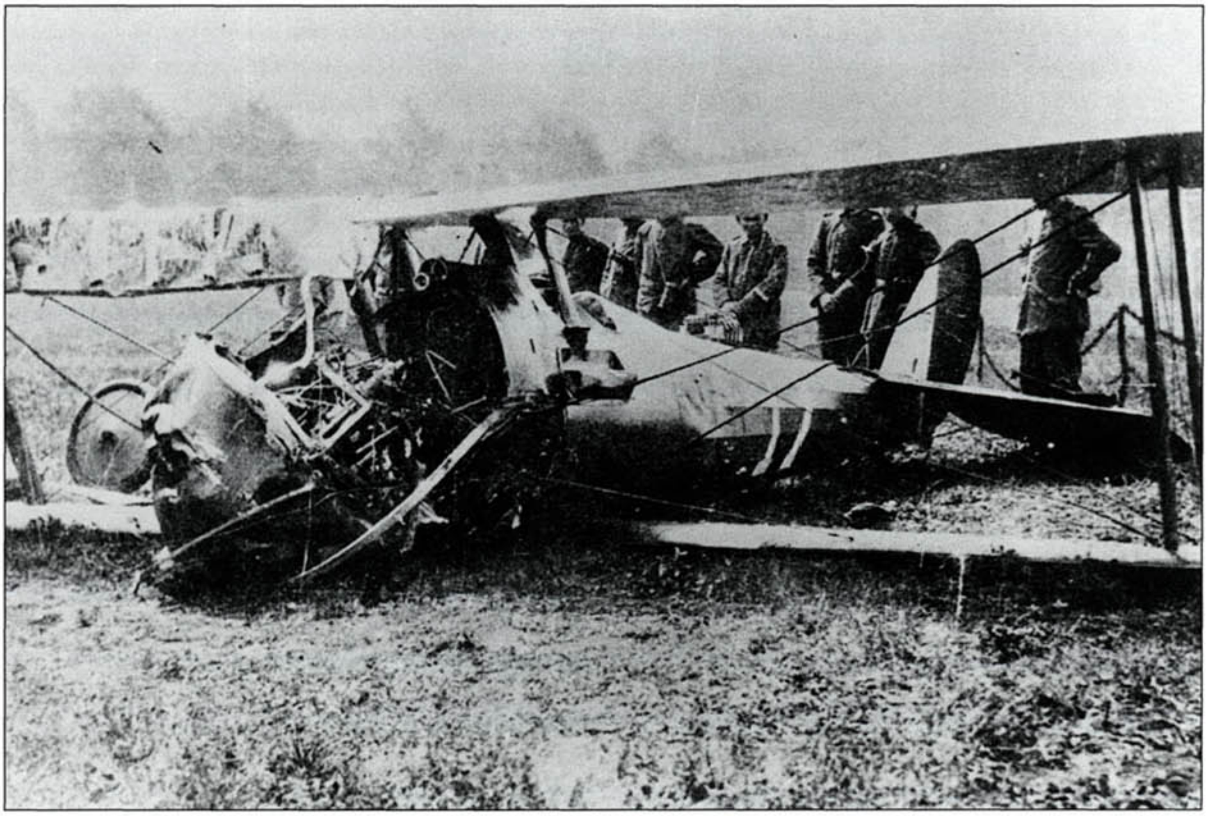
integrated with the 95th into the 1st Pursuit Group, under Maj Atkinson. On that same day, in response to the stepped-up aggressiveness of the Allies in its sector, *Armee Abteilung C* got a second *Jagdstaffel* – Prussian *Jasta* 65 under Ltn Otto Fitzner, which had seen some previous action over the Verdun front, but only had four pilots when it joined *Jasta* 64w at Mars-la-Tour.

Since Blodgett's 2 May victory, the 95th felt entitled to adopt a unit insignia as the 94th had. Maj Johnson suggested a mule, symbol of the US Army and his alma mater, the US Military Academy at West Point, in New York, and this was depicted kicking backward within a blue ellipse. Not long afterward, Buckley and 1Lt Edward Buford Jnr spotted a mule pulling a French garbage wagon, and with a bundle of francs they purchased the beast, which they named 'Jake', to be the squadron mascot.

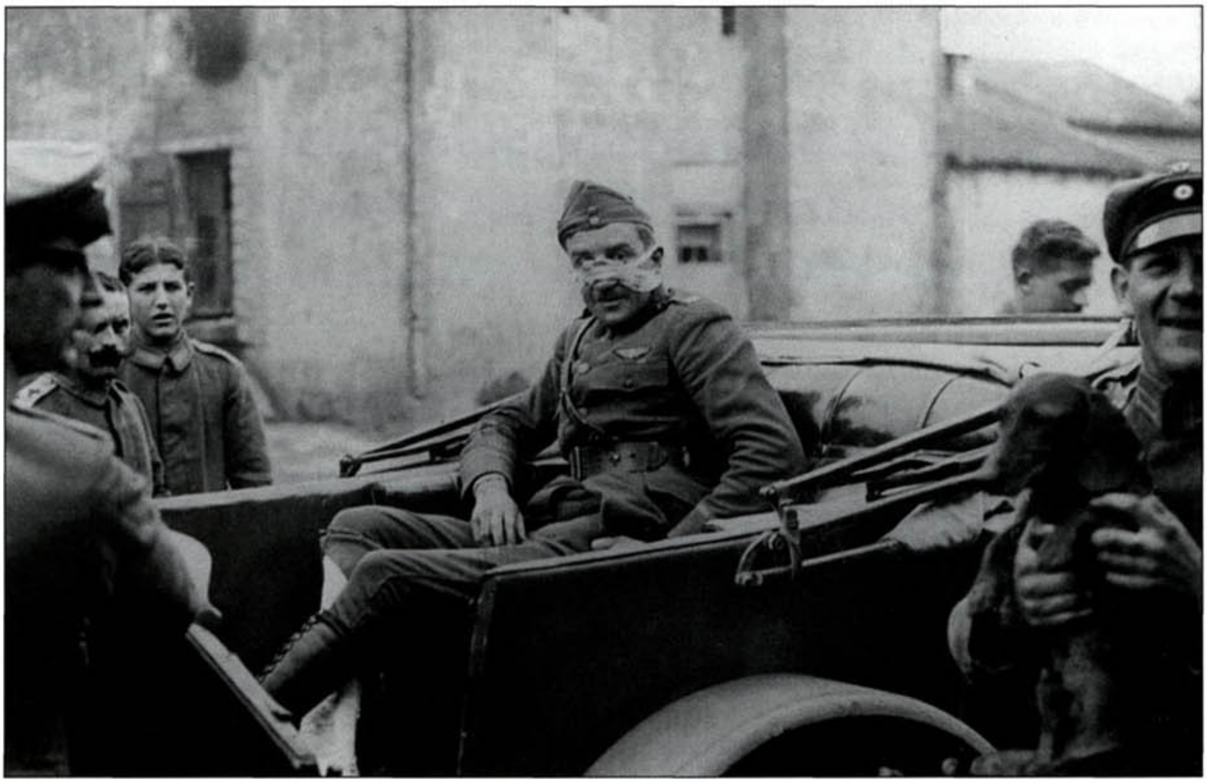
## HALL GOES DOWN

Cloudy weather limited operations until 7 May, when all of *Jasta* 64w's serviceable fighters took off on a special mission – to guard the sector while visiting King Friedrich August III of Saxony reviewed the troops. Circling over the area, the German pilots spotted air bursts from M Flak 54, and Ltn Hengst led two others over to investigate.

Over Vieville-en-Haye, they ran into three Nieuports of the 94th – Capt Hall leading 1Lts Rickenbacker and M Edwin Green. The Germans fired first, but the Americans had the height advantage and dived on them. During the fight Rickenbacker or Green got in a shot that wounded Ltn Wilhelm Scheerer in the stomach, and he crash-landed his fighter east of Vieville, where members of the 255. *Infanterie-Division* found him semiconscious.



**German soldiers examine the remains of Capt James Norman Hall's Nieuport N6153 'White 17' after it was shot down on 7 May 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



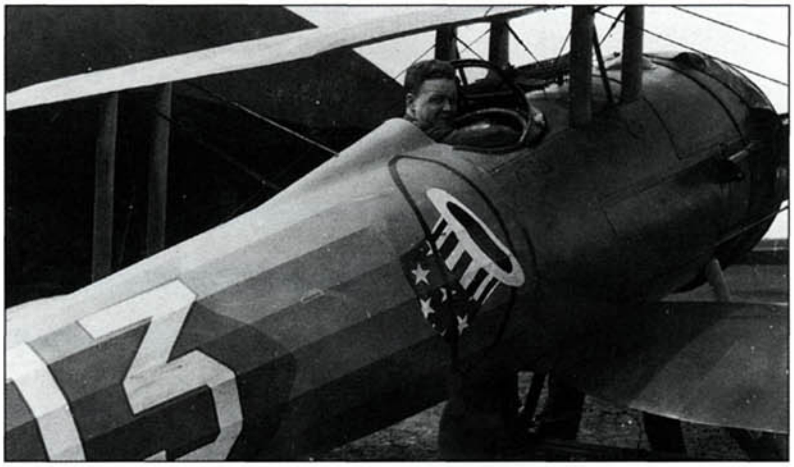
**Nursing a broken nose and a broken ankle, Capt Hall awaits transport to hospital, and eventually captivity, at *Jasta* 64w's aerodrome at Mars-la-Tour (*Michael Hamaty via Charles Woolley*)**

Hengst, meanwhile, managed to shake Hall off with a sharp turn, got on his tail and followed the American as he went into a dive. At that juncture Hall's upper wing fabric tore away and a 37 mm shell from one of M Flak 54's guns smashed his motor. Under the circumstances, Hall was fortunate to survive the subsequent crash landing with only his nose and right ankle broken. In spite of all the simultaneous factors involved in his capture, Hall's demise was credited to Ltn Hengst.

While awaiting transport to Landshut prison, the American learned from his hosts at Mars-la-Tour that Willi Scheerer had died of his wounds a few hours after being shot down. Strangely, neither Rickenbacker nor Green had seen Scheerer's crash, but after Hall's release on 16 November 1918, his report confirmed the victory, which was belatedly credited to Rickenbacker.

Awarded the *Croix de Guerre* with five palms, the *Médaille Militaire*, *Légion d'Honneur* and Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for his wartime service, James Norman Hall would subsequently achieve his greatest fame for his 28-year writing collaboration with LFC colleague Charles B Nordhoff in a two-volume *History of the Lafayette Flying Corps*, the *Bounty* Trilogy (*Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Men Against the Sea* and *Pitcairn's Island*), and *The Hurricane* and *Botany Bay*. Hall was in the process of completing an autobiography when he died of a heart attack at Papeete, in Tahiti, on 6 July 1951.

Capt Marr had a close call on 10 May when his Nieuport collided with the fighter flown by Thorne Taylor's while taxiing on Gengoult airfield. Their wings locked together and the firing mechanism of Marr's machine guns stuck open, both aeroplanes spun around like 'a gigantic pin wheel', as Rickenbacker described it, spraying bullets in all directions until Marr's weapons ran out of ammunition or jammed.



Like Rickenbacker and Winslow, 2Lt Thorne C Taylor added a personal marking below the cockpit of his Nieuport N6148 'White 13' in the form of his old college fraternity Delta Tau Delta (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

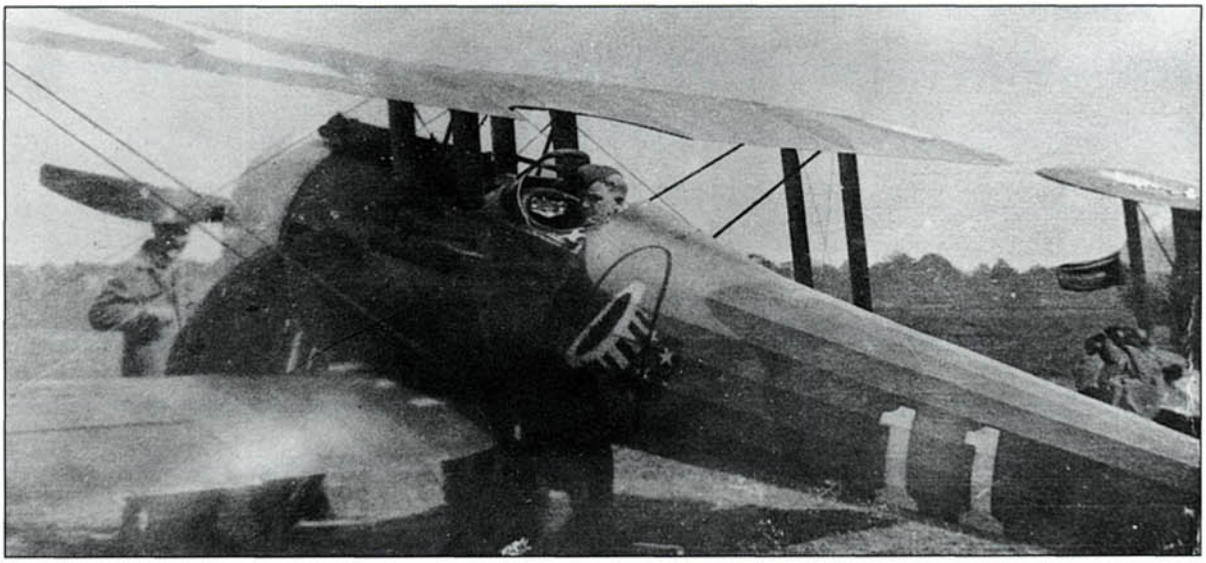
After several days of bad flying weather and a few indecisive combats, on 15 May 1Lt Reed McKinley Chambers reported that he fired 40 rounds into a kite balloon north of Flirey at 1120 hrs, stating 'Large black cloud of smoke was seen after attack and no balloon when smoke cleared'. No confirming witnesses saw flames, however, and the damage he inflicted on *Ballonzug* 123's *Drachen* was repaired and the gas bag sent aloft once again at 1440 hrs.

At 1150 hrs Capt Peterson was on a solo patrol when he spotted two enemy aeroplanes near Thiaucourt. Positioning himself with the sun to his back as they headed for Allied lines, he subsequently reported;

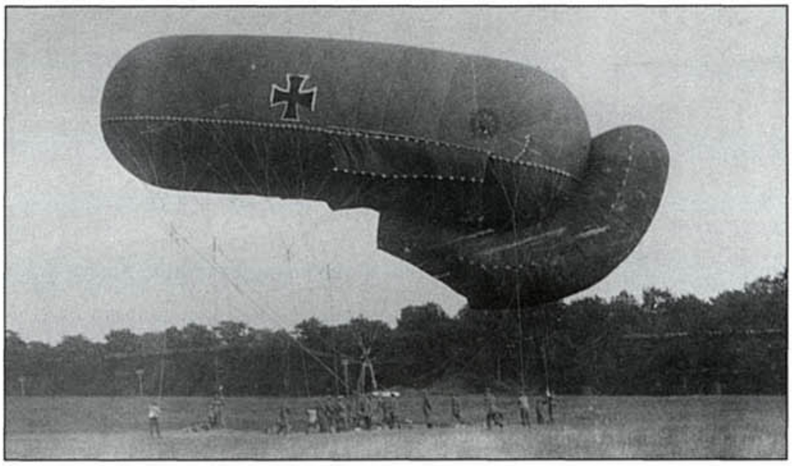
'I swung in behind and attacked the rear one from above, firing 50 shots. He dove almost vertically for 500 metres and then burst into flames. In the meantime, the other aeroplane had attacked me from in front. I turned and attacked him from above – he threw out a cloud of smoke, then attempted a sharp turn. He went about a quarter through the turn, then slipped and his wings folded up, one of them becoming detached. He dropped away, and I could not see him hit the ground on account of the cloud and fog. I fired 75 shots in total.'

Although German reports indicate no aircrew losses for 15 May, Peterson was credited with his third and fourth victories. Later that day he was transferred to take command of the 95th Aero Squadron, as Maj Johnson – an unpopular martinet and questionable fighter pilot, but a superb administrator – was assigned to Paris for duty with the AEF's Chief of Air Service, Col William Mitchell.

Campbell attacked a two-seater west of Thiaucourt on the 16th, only to lose it in the clouds. Although the aeroplane was not confirmed to him, Fl Abt (A) 298b reported that one of its pilots, Vzfw Adam Merkl, was



Seen at Gengoult, future 94th Aero Squadron ace 1Lt Reed McKinley Chambers peers from the cockpit of his Nieuport N6179, which has the white cowling of 'B' Flight but has yet to get its second machine gun (*Greg VanWyngarden*)



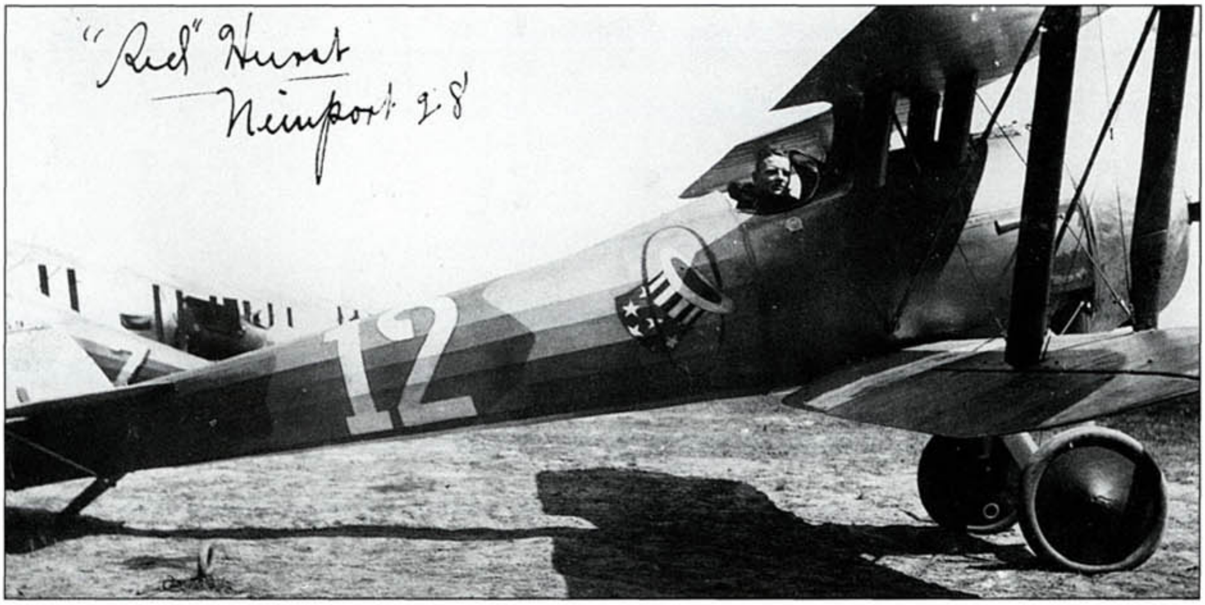
**'*Püppchen*', an outdated but still usable *Drachen*-type kite balloon of *Ballonzug* 112, is released for observation duty at Côte Lorraine in May 1918. Ringed by flak and machine guns, balloons were especially daunting targets for the relatively fragile Nieuport 28s, but Jimmy Meissner destroyed a drifting one and attacked another on 16 May 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

mortally wounded, dying in the field hospital at Chambley the next day. Meissner saw an unidentified balloon drifting northward and destroyed it, unaware that it was from Bz 214, its tether cable severed by Allied artillery fire. At 1800 hrs Meissner spotted another balloon southwest of Mars-la-Tour and fired 100 rounds at it. The observer took to his parachute and Bz 47 was forced to pull its *Drachen* down before an Albatros intervened, compelling Meissner to disengage.

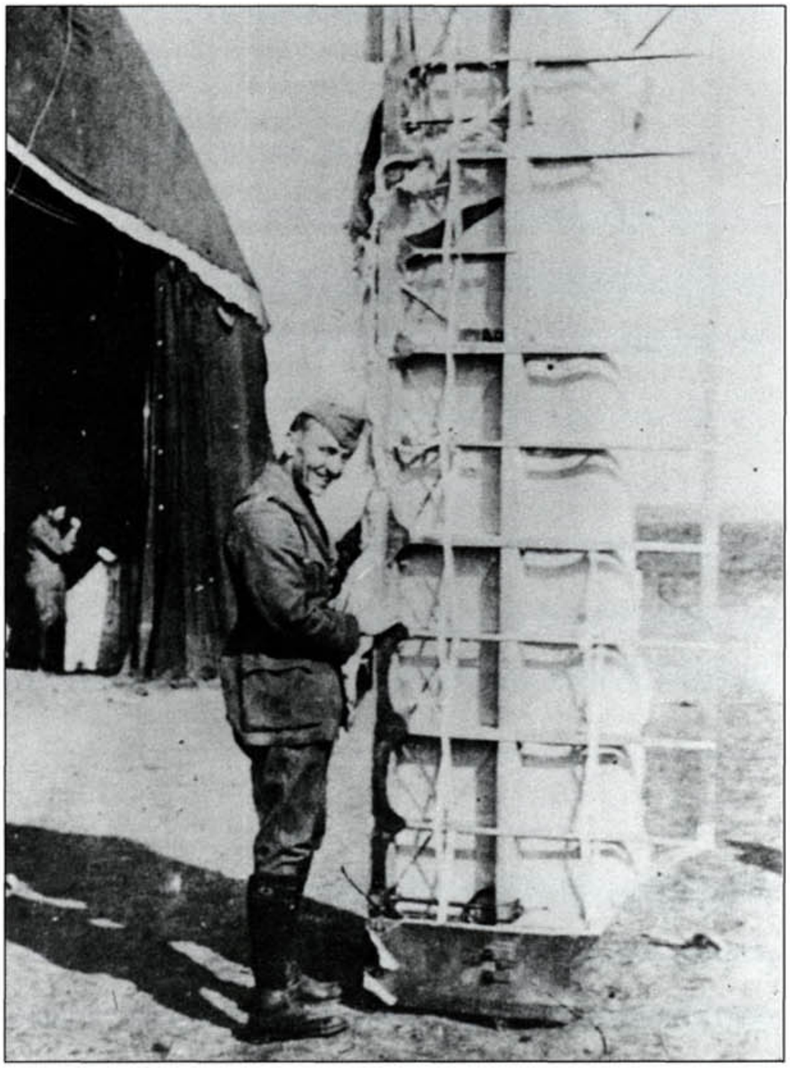
Almost cloudless skies on 17 May heralded a week of heavy activity. That morning, Rickenbacker was on a solo flight at 4500 metres when he spotted a trio of Albatros D Vas flying below him near Richemont. Diving on them, he fired at one Albatros and saw it spin down, but as he levelled out his upper wing fabric stripped away and his own machine, now nose-heavy, spun downward. At 1000 metres, 'Rick' managed to regain control and gradually flattened out, returning to crash land at his aerodrome. A subsequent report from the front confirmed that his D Va had crashed behind German lines, but the pilot was not seriously hurt.

Later that morning, Ltn d R Wilhelm Beyer and Ludwig Kämmerer of Fl Abt (A) 298b were interrupted in their reconnaissance duties by a lone Nieuport over Bernecourt, but the observer's defensive fire drove their assailant down in a clearly damaged state. Their victim was most likely Dick Blodgett, who was returning from an escort mission when he became the 95th Aero Squadron's first combat fatality.

That evening, two aeroplanes from Fl Abt 46b ran afoul of two other 95th Nieuports between Brasseute and Marbotte. Leaving 1Lt John A Hambleton to provide top cover, Dave Peterson attacked one German, and after his second firing pass saw it turn over on its side and spin



**Mechanic 'Red' Hunt sits in the cockpit of Rickenbacker's Nieuport N6159 'White 12' after Rick had plastered Third Liberty Loan posters on the right upper and lower wings and affixed a St Christopher medallion under the cockpit (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



**Having had time to regain his composure, a grinning Rickenbacker shows the upper wing panel of Nieuport N6169 – originally assigned to Maj Huffer – after the fabric peeled off during a dive on 17 May 1918. Rick, who had been credited with an Albatros in the action, scored three more victories flying the repaired N6169 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

downward. At that point, however, the second aircraft, crewed by Uffz Fritz Mohr and Ltn Kurt von Brüchner, attacked Peterson and then nose-dived away.

It was not until 16 August that the Americans learned of what had happened to Peterson's first opponent on 17 May. Capt Charles J Biddle of the 13th Aero Squadron brought down a Rumpler C V whose pilot, Uffz Johann Eichner, turned out to have been flying LVG C VI 14512/17 on the 17th. Eichner stated that his engine had been hit and it caught fire as he neared the ground. He nevertheless managed to force land near Woinville, and both he and his observer, Ltn d R Wilhelm Ortagel, emerged unhurt. As a result of that interrogation Peterson was credited with his ace-making fifth – and the 95th's first – confirmed aerial victory.

Two aircraft of Fl Abt 46b came under attack by 95th Aero Squadron Nieuports on the morning of 18 May, and although one was hit in the engine, it was not credited to the Americans. At 0920 hrs Campbell scored hits on a Rumpler of Fl Abt (A) 279 that, after being further harassed by French anti-aircraft fire, force landed between the lines at Bonzée-en-Woevre and turned over in a shell hole. French soldiers wounded the observer, Ltn Isselstein, and pinned down both crewmen until the evening twilight allowed them to make their way back to German trenches.

While the 94th and 95th were seeing combat on the 18th, the 27th and 147th Aero Squadrons were preparing to join them at Toul. At the 27th, 1Lt Malcolm Gunn proposed a shield in a cloud pierced by an arrow as the squadron insignia, but it was rejected by the Chief of Air Service because it could be confused with the 94th's Hat-in-the-Ring. Groundcrewman Cpl Blumberg then drew up an eagle with wings outspread and talons extended, possibly inspired by the logo that adorned Anheuser Busch beer wagons, and this was adopted as the 27th's emblem.

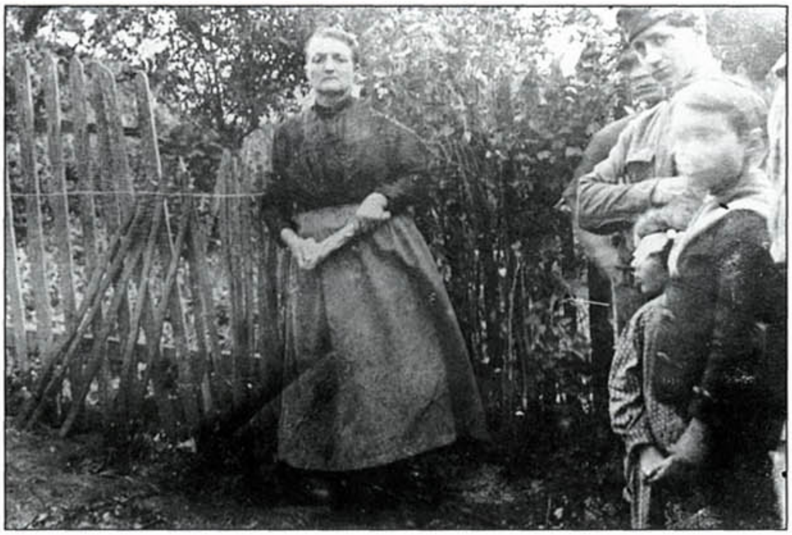
The 147's emblem was a rat terrier, allegedly modelled after one that its commander, Maj Geoffrey H Bonnell, remembered from his time with a previous squadron that he had flown with in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), under which was often added the slogan 'Who said rats!'

As its pilots began scoring victories, the 1st Pursuit Group also developed unique ways of signifying them on its aircraft. Pilots of the 94th Aero Squadron would display a cross for each enemy aeroplane shot down within the rim of Uncle Sam's hat, while the 95th put crosses within black horseshoes under its mule's hind legs and the 147th hung a dead black rat under the terrier's paws.

## THE LOSS OF LUFBERY

The 94th Aero Squadron's most dramatic day since the loss of Jimmy Hall began at 0930 hrs on 19 May, when a Rumpler from *Armee Abteilung C*'s *Reihenbildtrupp* (long-range picture section) Nr 3, flown by Gefr Otto

**Although friends in the 94th Aero Squadron, 1Lts Edward Rickenbacker and Oscar J Gude were not birds of a feather. Gude proved to be a hopeless coward, while 'Rick' ended the war as a squadron leader and American 'ace of aces', and was eventually awarded the Medal of Honor (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



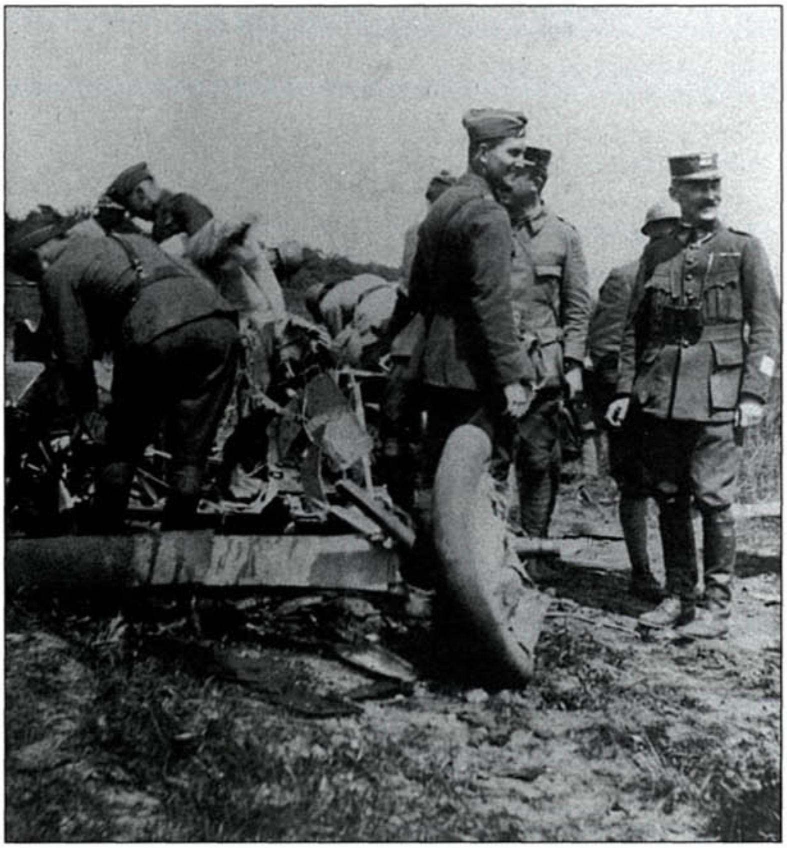
A peasant woman of Maron holds the piece of picket fence she removed from Maj Lufbery's neck after he fell from his stricken aeroplane on 19 May 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

Kirschbaum and Ltn Kurt Scheibe, crossed the lines, drawing the hostile attention of both French *escadrille* SPA68 and the 94th Aero Squadron.

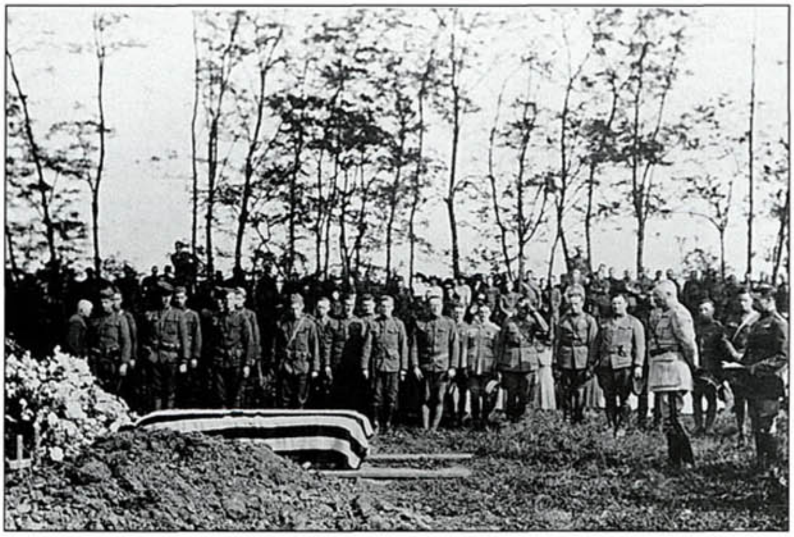
First to take off was 1Lt Oscar J Gude, a wealthy, musically talented and well liked squadronmate, but a pathologically timid pilot who wastefully fired off his ammunition at hopelessly long range.

Lufbery and Huffer took off five minutes later, and the former made two attacks before Scheibe's return fire apparently severed a control wire or even his control column, throwing the Nieuport into an abrupt roll. Lufbery, who in his haste may not have fastened his seat belt, fell from his aeroplane and struck a garden fence near the village of Maron. The Germans resumed their mission, only to be attacked by SPADs from SPA68. Scheibe's return fire struck Adjutant Pierre Baudry in the heart, but then Sgt Dupré forced the Rumpler down near Flainval, where its crew was taken prisoner.

An hour after Lufbery died, Doug Campbell attacked another Rumpler near Verdun, and in spite of jammed guns, he continued engaging the enemy until he got them working again and fired a burst that sent the aeroplane down in flames near Flirey. The crewmen, Ltn d R Beyer and



Doug Campbell joins American and French personnel near Flirey to examine the Rumpler he had shot down in flames an hour after Lufbery's death. His victims, Ltn d R Wilhelm Beyer and Ludwig Kämmerer of Fl Abt (A) 298b, had probably killed 1Lt Richard A Blodgett of the 95th Aero Squadron two days earlier (*Jon Guttman*)



**Maj Gen Clarence R Edwards, commander of the 26th Division – who had earlier been Lufbery's CO when they had served in the Philippines – pays his last respects at the ace's funeral at Sebastopol Forest on 20 May 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

Kämmerer of Fl Abt (A) 298b, were killed, avenging not only Lufbery's death, but perhaps more directly Dick Blodgett's. The 94th lost one more aeroplane soon after Campbell's third victory, however, when 1Lt Joseph H Eastman demolished Nieuport N6149 in a forced landing near Menil.

The 94th suspended operations on the 20th to attend Lufbery's funeral at the American Cemetery near the Sebastopol Woods. At the time of his death, Lufbery was the leading American ace with 16 victories, all scored in the *Escadrille Lafayette*. His many decorations included the *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, Médaille Militaire, Croix de Guerre* with ten palms and the British Military Cross. On 4 July 1928, Lufbery's remains were reinterred in the *Lafayette Escadrille* Memorial.

The 21st saw an LVG C VI of Fl Abt 46b weather several attacks by 1Lts Meissner and Taylor of the 94th. An hour later, a Rumpler C IV of Fl Abt 46b fought off successive attacks by three 95th Nieuports and by 1Lt Willard D Hill and 2Lt Winslow of the 94th – the latter subsequently suffered engine failure and crash-landed near Andilly, resulting in his Nieuport (N6184) being written off.

At 0800 hrs on 22 May, an LVG and its Hannover escort, both from Fl Abt 46b, were attacked by four Nieuports of the 95th and the LVG escaped in a steep dive between Aulnois and Gironville. Some witnesses thought it looked convincingly enough in trouble to confirm it to 'Ned' Buford, even though he had merely reported 'I saw one machine fall in the first fight'. Similarly, during a fight between the 94th and three Albatros D Vas that morning, Rickenbacker reported one 'enemy aeroplane last seen diving steeply north of Flirey', and it was credited to him. The Germans made no claims, but as the 94th returned to Gengoult, 1Lt Paul B Kurtz's Nieuport N6185 burst into flame and he crashed to his death near the airfield.

In curious comparison to the dubious successes of 22 May, on the 23rd 1Lts Hambleton, John L Mitchell and Eugene B Jones of the 95th engaged LVG C V 1759/18 of Fl Abt 46b for 15 minutes. Although Hambleton had to disengage with a stalled motor and Mitchell with a gun stoppage, the LVG force landed near Vigneulles with its crew, Ltn d R Heinrich Will and Konrad Miesgang, seriously wounded. In spite of all that, it was not credited to the three Americans.

**Officers of the 95th Aero Squadron pose for an official photograph at Toul in June 1918. They are, in the top row, from left to right, Paul H Montague, Royal U St John (operations), John A Hambleton, Edward L Thomas (supply), Harold R Buckley, John L Mitchell, Grover C Vann, Stuart E McKeown and George F Fisher. Middle row, from left to right, Edward P Curtis, H Lawrence Richards, Eugene B Jones (transferred to the 103rd Aero Squadron on 3 June), Carlyle Rhodes, Maj Davenport Johnson (CO), Stanton Higgins (adjutant), 'Russ' Hall, William H Taylor, Alex McLanahan and 'Jake' (mascot). In the front row are Waldo Heinrichs (left) and 'Ned' Buford (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

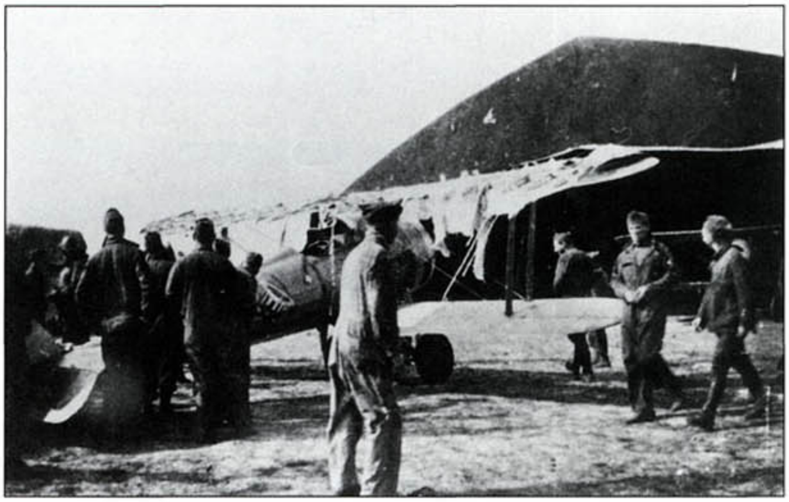
Behind the battle lines, the 27th Aero Squadron suffered a tragic loss on 26 May when two Nieuports being flown as replacements crashed at Housselmont, killing 1Lts James C Marquardt and Patrick Ingersoll.

On 27 May Fl Abt 46b crews reported three encounters in the course of four morning missions. In addition, there was a confused dogfight over Xivray involving five Nieuports of the 94th, at least three of the 95th and five Albatros D Vas of *Jasta* 65. 'One reversed direction before I fired', Campbell wrote. 'I fired about 50 rounds into the other, followed him into a dive and then pulled out of the fight. When I looked around again, a machine was falling in two or three pieces'. His fourth confirmed victory resulted in the death of *Jasta* 65's Ltn d R Walter Fritzsche.

John Mitchell reported downing a 'biplace' that put two holes in his wing, although the Germans acknowledged no such loss. *Jasta* 65 was no less confused, with Ltn Otto Fitzner being credited with a 'SPAD' over Aprémont, which was probably the 95th's Willard Hill, who returned seriously wounded. Off Stv Tiedje was credited with a second 'SPAD' that allegedly crashed into Fritzsche's aeroplane, although the Americans suffered no further casualties, and nobody else reported seeing a mid-air collision.

At 1700 hrs, Fl Abt 46b performed yet another reconnaissance flight between Xivray and St Mihiel, but only the escort returned to report that four Nieuports had swooped out of the clouds to destroy LVG C V 1752/18 in flames, killing Ltn d R Hans Behringer and Wilhelm Ortegel, the latter falling from his observer's pit as it went down. The victory was credited to 1Lts 'Ned' Buford, Edward Peck Curtis, George F Fisher and Alexander H McLanahan of the 95th Aero Squadron.

Rickenbacker and Campbell attacked two-seaters of Fl Abt (A) 289b on the 28th, one spinning down after Rick fired 75 rounds into it. This success brought Rickenbacker his fourth victory (pending the subsequent



**1Lt Meissner survived another torn fabric incident – this time involving a mid-air collision – on 30 May in Nieuport N6144, now marked up as 'White 8', and sporting a different cowling. Meissner was credited with destroying the German aeroplane that collided with him, while at Mars-la-Tour, Off Stv Tiedje of *Jasta* 65 was likewise credited with downing the American! (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

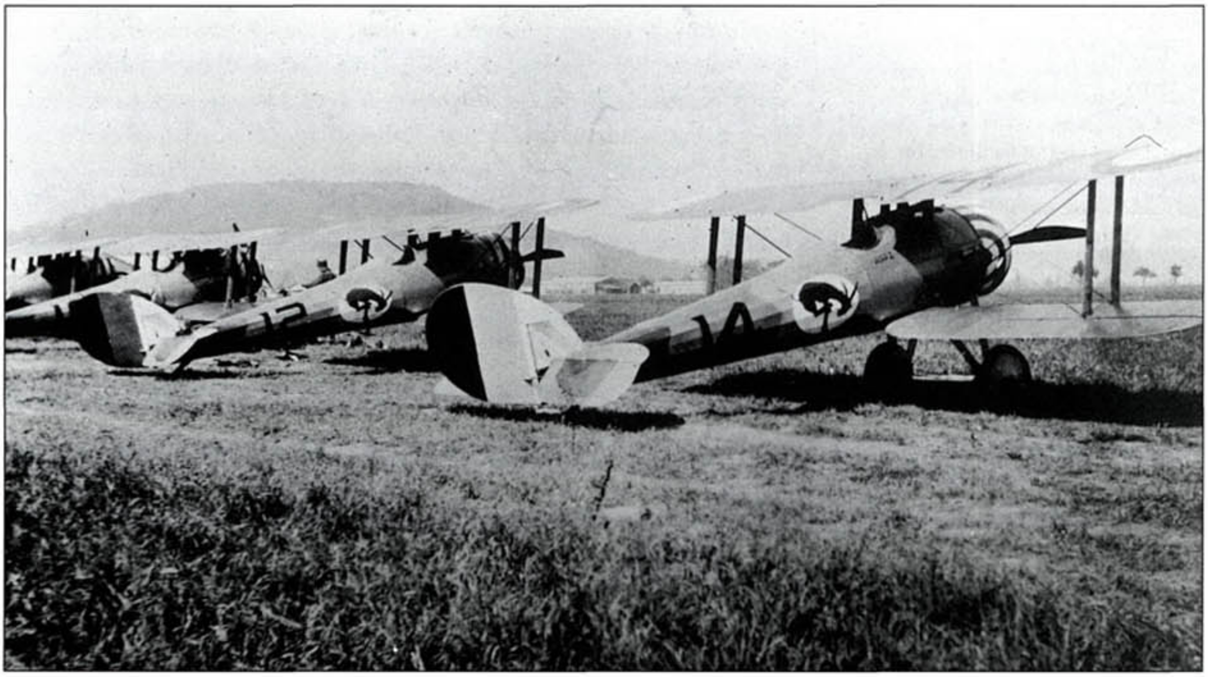
confirmation of his Pfalz on 7 May). 1Lts Hambleton and Taylor of the 95th claimed another two-seater a short while later, the pilots reporting that they had seen the aircraft going down smoking over enemy lines. Both German crewmen apparently survived, however.

William Henry Taylor Jnr had left Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, to drive ambulances with the American Field Service in France, prior to joining the USAS on 28 August 1917 and the 95th Aero Squadron in February 1918. Although only 19, Taylor was nicknamed 'Big Bill', not for his size but for the leadership qualities he demonstrated, which soon earned him command of 'C' Flight.

Amid a welter of air activity on 30 May Rickenbacker was credited with a two-seater near Jaulney at 0840 hrs, making him the first American-trained USAS fighter ace of the war, although no matching German loss has been identified.

While circling with a German fighter at 0955 hrs, Meissner was grazed from above by the landing gear of a second, which tore the guy wires of

**Nieuports of the 95th Aero Squadron at Gengoult in June 1918. 1Lt Eugene B Jones' 'Black 12' sports the vermillion and gold striped cowling of 'B' Flight, while 'Big Bill' Taylor's 'Black 14' displays 'C' Flight's dark blue and white cowling marking (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

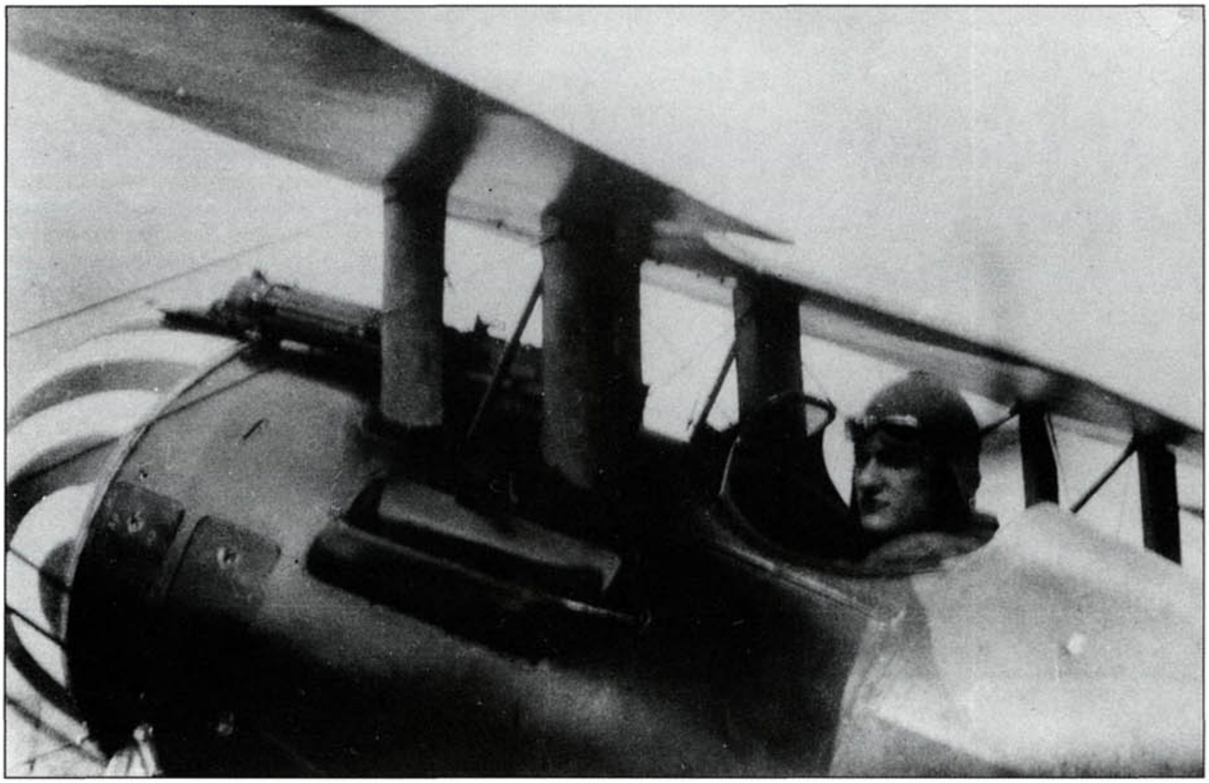


his upper wing. Rickenbacker fended off the enemy while Meissner nursed his aeroplane back over Allied lines. Meissner was credited with destroying the aircraft that had collided with him, on the assumption that it could not have survived the encounter, while at *Jasta* 65, he was being similarly credited to Off Stv Tiedje!

Thirty minutes later, five 95th Nieuports attacked two aeroplanes from Fl Abt 46b. Three Americans picked out DFW C V 2330/17, flown by Ltn Schneider and Flgr Schütze (aerial gunner) Kraft, but the latter's fire drove one Nieuport out of the fight. Rickenbacker claimed to have heard that the 95th pilot, 1Lt Wilfred V Casgrain, made the all-too-frequent error of pulling out of a dive too quickly and saw part of his wing fabric tear away. After slowly descending to a forced landing, he got out of his cockpit to check his map and was promptly fired at. As rifle fire kicked up the dirt at his heels, Casgrain took cover in a nearby wood, but after some thought he emerged with his hands raised in surrender.

'Poor old Casgrain evidently thought he was well behind the German lines after his first rude awakening', wrote Rickenbacker. 'As a matter of

**On 30 May 1918 1Lt Wilfred V Casgrain of the 95th Aero Squadron suffered the double embarrassment of being brought down by a German two-seater and of surrendering to the enemy because he did not know how close he was to the Allied frontline (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



**1Lt Harold Robert Buckley in the cockpit of a 'C' Flight Nieuport of the 95th, still armed with one machine gun. Born in Westfield, Massachusetts, Buckley shared in the two-seater victory on 30 May 1918, and went on to down four more enemy aeroplanes. In 1933 he wrote a history of his unit, *Squadron 95*, illustrated with drawings supplied by squadronmate Lansing C Holden. Buckley died in Rigby, Idaho, on 13 June 1958 (*The Museum of Flight, Seattle, Washington*)**

fact, he might just as well have walked in the other direction and passed into our own lines if he had only known that he was in No Man's Land'. Meanwhile, the diving DFW eluded its pursuers and later resumed its mission, but it was nevertheless credited as a victory to 1Lts Casgrain, Hambleton, Mitchell, Buckley and Stuart E McKeown.

## FULL GROUP STRENGTH

The last day of May saw Campbell and Eastman engage two-seaters over Lironville at 0805 hrs. 'My opponent during the five-minute fight exhausted all his ammunition without effect', Campbell reported, 'and I was then able to approach near and shoot with effect. He dived vertically, striking the ground just off the Limey-Montauville road, about half way between these two points'. Sgt Richard Strunk and Ltn d R Erich Külz of Fl Abt (A) 242 were killed and Doug Campbell became an ace.

At 1500 hrs on the 31st, the 1st Pursuit Group finally reached full strength when the 27th Aero Squadron, led by Maj Harold E Hartney, and the 147th, under Maj Geoffrey H Bonnell, arrived from Epiez and were both assigned to an aerodrome occupied by *escadrille* SAL122.

Hartney, a Canadian from Pakenham, Ontario, had scored six victories in FE 2d two-seat pushers with No 20 Sqn RFC, before joining the USAS. American-born Bonnell had also seen previous RFC service, flying Airco DH 2s with No 32 Sqn.

The two new squadrons constituted a vital addition to Allied strength in the Toul sector because local *escadrilles* SPA87, 92, 99 and 162 had just been transferred to the Soissons-Reims area, where the latest phase of the German spring offensive, or *Kaiserschlacht*, was taking place. As another consequence of this, American air operations were extended into the German 19. *Armee* sector.

**On 31 May 1918, the 1st Pursuit Group finally reached full strength when the 27th and 147th Aero Squadrons arrived at Gengoult. The 27th was commanded by Canadian-born Maj Harold E Hartney, who had previously scored six victories flying FE 2ds with No 20 Sqn RFC (*Jon Guttman*)**

On 2 June the new squadrons flew their first patrols, the 27th's flights being led by pilots of the 95th and the 147th's by men of the 94th. At 1510 hrs five Nieuports of the 94th engaged six Pfalz of *Jasta* 64w in a spirited dogfight, during which Ltn Hengst shot down another of its LFC members, 1Lt Philip W Davis, in flames east of St Mihiel.

On 3 June 1Lt Sumner Sewall of the 95th drove a DFW C V down in French lines near Dieulourd, where its crew was taken prisoner. The next day, however, the 147th suffered its first combat loss when 2Lt Edgar A Lawrence's aeroplane was struck by flak near Aouze and spun into the ground, killing him instantly.

On 5 June Campbell and Meissner spotted a Rumpler under French anti-aircraft fire and attacked. 'Stayed beneath Rumpler until it started to descend', Meissner reported. 'It spiralled and glided down, Lt Campbell and I following and shooting repeatedly until within 1000 metres of ground at 1025 hrs. The Rumpler landed between Eply and Mailly.'

Credited as Campbell's sixth and Meissner's third victories, the Rumpler was apparently from Fl Abt 12. Its pilot landed where his

**1Lt Sumner Sewall of the 95th Aero Squadron poses by the wreckage of the DFW C V he had shot down for his first victory on 3 June 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

observer, Ltn Löschmann, could be treated for a severe arm wound. Campbell, however, was also wounded in the back and had to be invalided out of the 94th. Aside from being one of the pioneer American fighter pilots, Campbell was exceptional in that all six of his victories – and even one of the unconfirmed ones – corresponded with documented German casualties.

On the same day that Campbell climaxed his career, Maj Huffer was relieved of command of the 94th, possibly because of the passive role he had played during Lufbery's last combat, and his place taken by Capt Kenneth Marr. Four days later Huffer was given command of the 93rd Aero Squadron. Oscar Gude was also transferred to that unit, and on 22 October he would desert in Huffer's SPAD XIII, landing at Mars-la-Tour and allegedly surrendering to *Jasta* 65 personnel with the offhand remark *'Fini la guerre'*.

Poor weather limited air operations until 13 June – a sunny day full of activity by the British bombers of Independent Force, as well as the Americans. At 18,000 ft over Thiaucourt, Meissner, Winslow and Taylor attacked a Hannover, whose gunner managed to riddle all three of their scouts until its pilot veered too far over and the aircraft flipped into a spin.

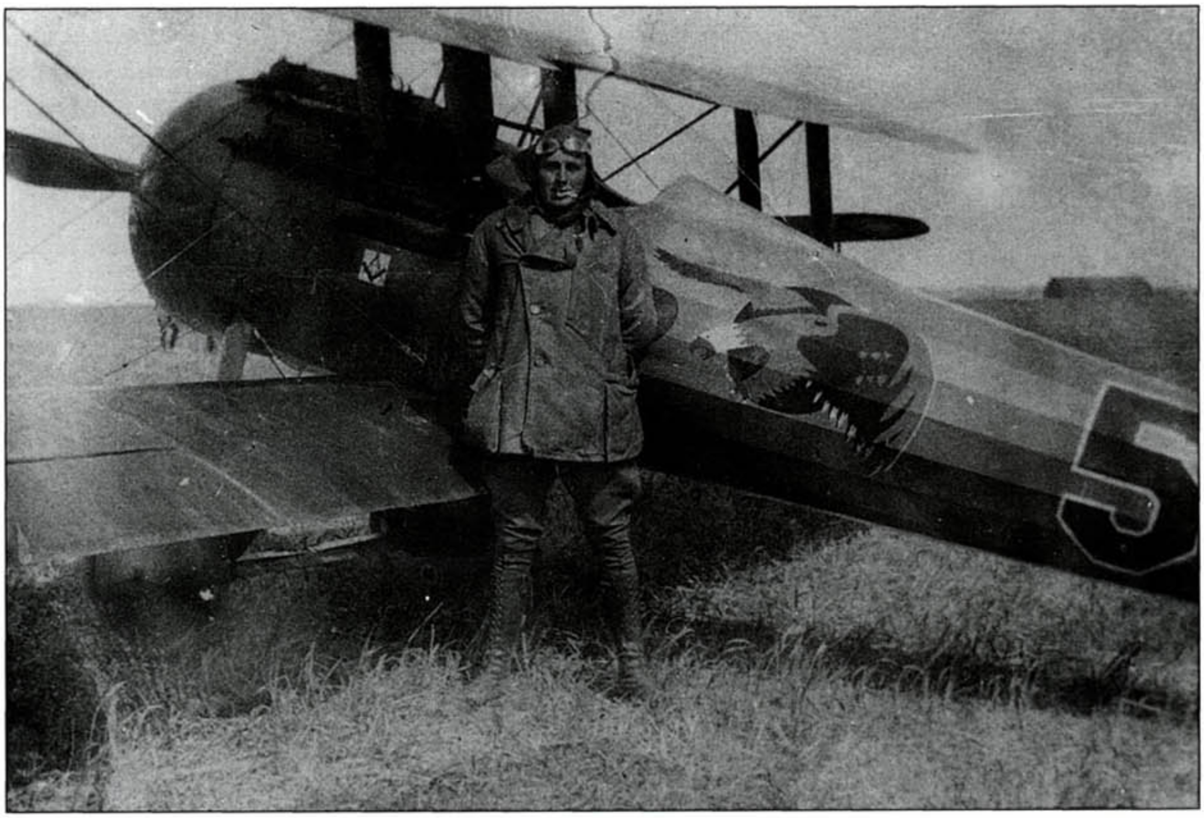
By the time the German recovered, it had lost enough altitude for the Americans to have better control of their aeroplanes. Winslow fired first, igniting the fuel tank, and the Hannover descended, its wings shedding

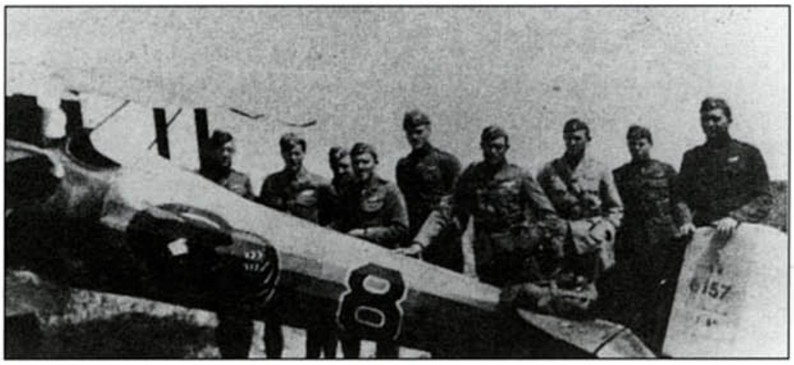
**1Lts Rickenbacker and Campbell pose in front of a 'B' Flight Nieuport, which has had its cowling, inner portion of the propeller and wheel hubs painted white. Standing at right is Capt Kenneth Marr, who took command of the 94th Aero Squadron on 5 June 1918 – the same day Campbell scored his sixth, and last, victory (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

fabric and its observer defiantly blazing away at his tormentors until the flames engulfed him. Winslow was recommended for the DSC. His late opponents were two longtime adversaries of the 94th, Sgt Mohr and Ltn von Brückner of Fl Abt 46b.

About an hour later, 1Lts Eugene W Rucker and William H Plyler and 2Lts John K MacArthur and Kenneth S Clapp of the 27th were escorting two Salmson 2A2s of the 91st Aero Squadron when they were jumped from out of the sun by Albatros D Vas of *Kampf Einsitzer Staffel* 3. Flgr Bünning disabled Plyler's engine and forced him to land south of Goin, where he was taken prisoner. Rucker, MacArthur and Clapp, in turn, claimed an Albatros, but *Kest* 3's only recorded casualty, Ltn Kurt von

**This Nieuport of the 27th Aero Squadron displays the 'Screaming Eagle' insignia, black (white-outlined) number '5' and a Masonic personal marking below the left machine gun. The identity of the pilot standing alongside the Nieuport remains unknown (*Jon Guttman*)**





Pilots of the 27th crowd around 1Lt William J Hoover's Nieuport N6157 'Black 8', which bore the personal sobriquet *"Becky"* beneath the port gun. Note also how the tricolour on the fighter's tail appears to be red-blue-white, rather than the standard red-white-blue. These men are believed to be, from left to right, Alfred A Grant, Richard C Martin, Frederick L Ordway, Jerry Vasconcells, Harry H Harkins, Ivan Roberts, Harold E Hartney, Donald Hudson and an unknown officer (*Jon Guttman*)

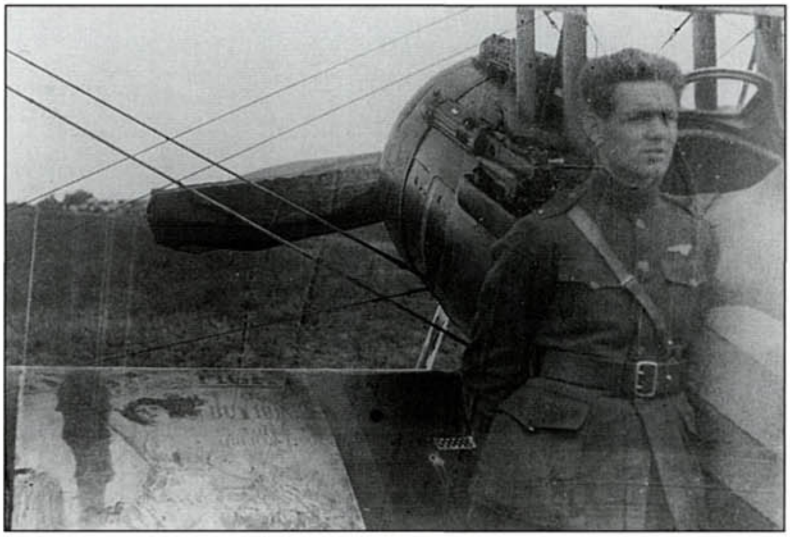
Seelen, had been slightly wounded earlier that day, in an engagement with de Havilland DH 4s of No 55 Sqn, Independent Force.

Bad weather returned for a time, then on the 24th three Nieuports of the 27th Aero Squadron were escorting three French SPAD XVIs of SPA(bi)22 when 1Lt Robert F Raymond dropped out with engine trouble. At that point a German two-seater attacked him, but he shot it down out of control. Raymond then spotted his own patrol returning and rejoined it. His claim went unconfirmed, but on 25 June 2Lt MacArthur officially opened the 27th's account with a two-seater over Lorry, southeast of Metz, wounding the pilot, Vzfw Mühlhausen of Fl Abt 12, while Maj Hartney claimed an escorting Albatros D Va out of control. Although the Germans lost no scouts that day, the latter was credited as Hartney's seventh victory.

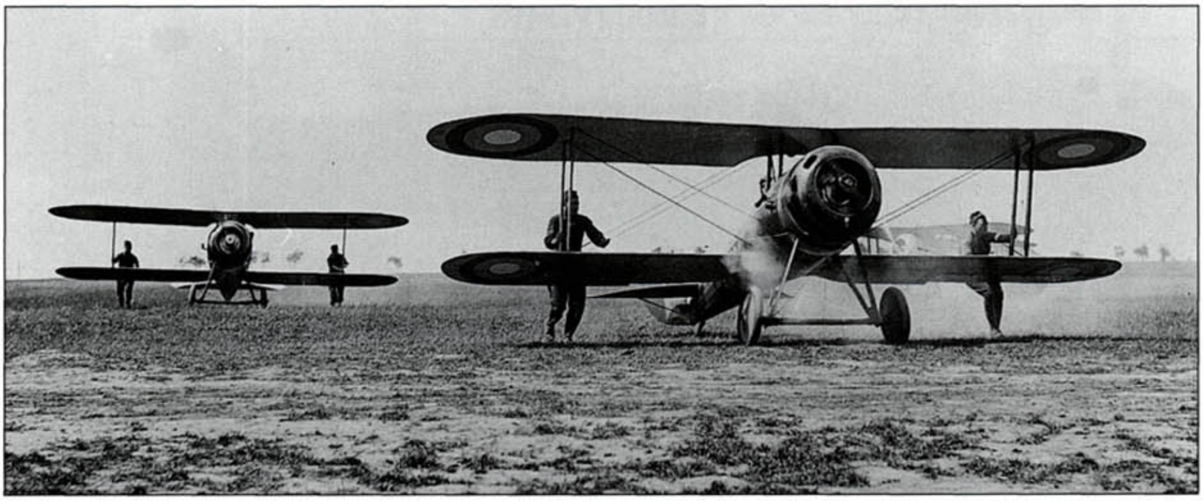
At 0431 hrs that same morning, a flight of 147th Aero Squadron Nieuports left Toul to rendezvous with a French Salmson over Lorry and escort it home. Instead, the pilots became disoriented in a pea soup fog that dispersed the formation.

The flight leader, 2Lt Charles P 'Pip' Porter, came down at Baccarat when his fuel ran out, while 2Lt George A S Robertson landed at Lunéville. 2Lt William E Brotherton was fired on by anti-aircraft guns throughout most of this odyssey, finally landing in Allied lines between the Rhine River and the city of Mulhausen, just 15 kilometres from the Swiss border. 2Lt Thomas J Abernethy almost made it back to Toul before force-landing in a wheat field, demolishing his aeroplane. The wind blew 2Lt James F Ashenden to the southwest, and he encountered enemy flak over Metz which damaged his propeller. When his fuel gave out he crash-landed in what turned out to be Solothurn Canton, in Switzerland, where he would remain interned until 28 November.

Impressed by the sleek lines of Ashenden's 'Newport Doppeldecker' (N6212), the Swiss had repaired it by August, when it entered their service



2Lt George Gale Willard of the 147th Aero Squadron, seen beside a Nieuport with a Third Liberty Loan poster on the left lower wing, was an LFC veteran with prior service in *escadrille* N157 (*Thomas J Abernethy via Jon Guttman*)



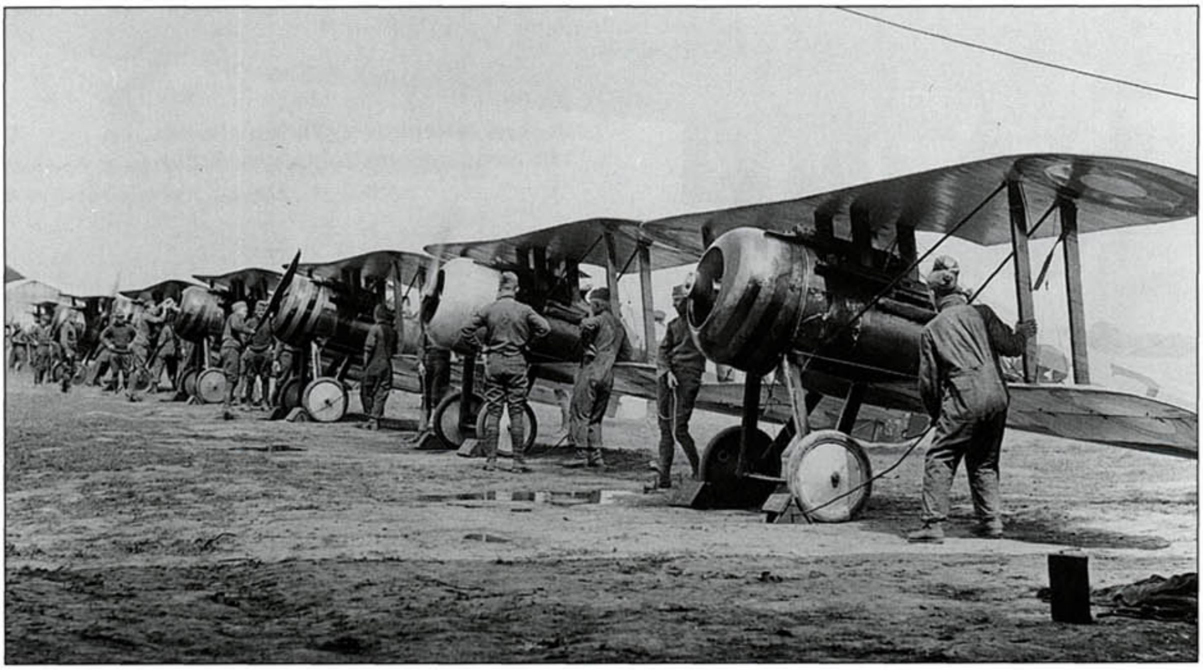
Nieuports of 'B' Flight, 95th Aero Squadron, warm up prior to taking off from Gengoult on 22 June 1918 *(Greg VanWyngarden)*

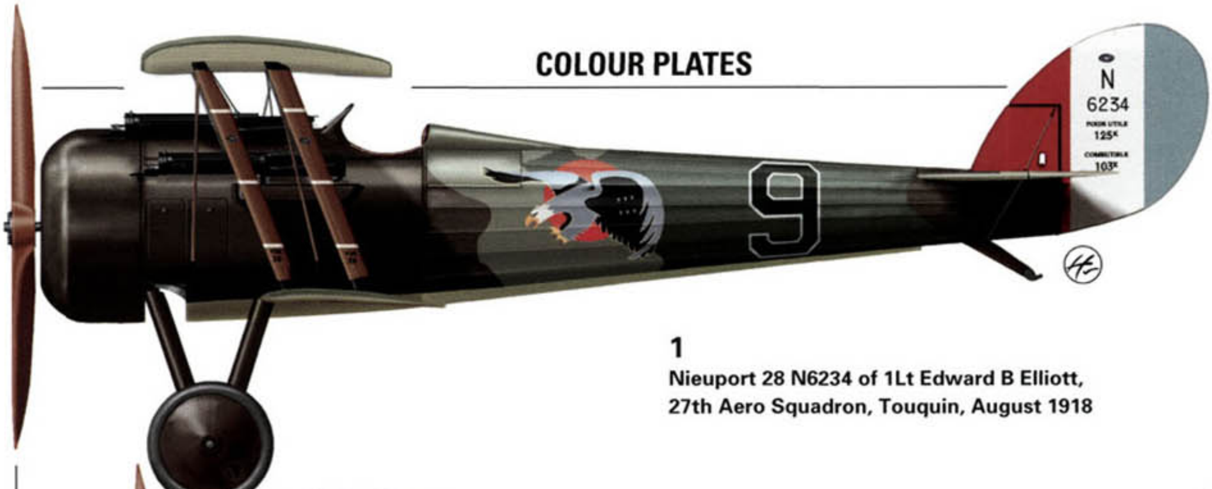
with the serial number 607. Oblt Robert Ackermann used it to win the First International Aerobatic Meet at Dübendorf in 1922, convincing the Swiss to purchase another 14 Nieuport 28s, which served as fighter trainers from 1923 to 1930. Retired in August 1925, Nieuport 607 was eventually restored and put on display in the Swiss Air Force Museum at Dübendorf.

On 27 June the 1st Pursuit Group received orders to leave for Saints aerodrome near the Marne River, where it would participate in Allied efforts to stem what turned out to be the final German bid for victory. New American squadrons would take its place at Toul, restoring a lull that *Armee Abteilung* C's air units had not known since the 94th Aero Squadron had begun raising hell over their area.

The Toul sector had given the 1st Pursuit Group pilots a relatively easy environment in which to hone their fighting skills and gain confidence. They had done well and felt ready, willing and able to take on the enemy's best, which was just what they were about to do.

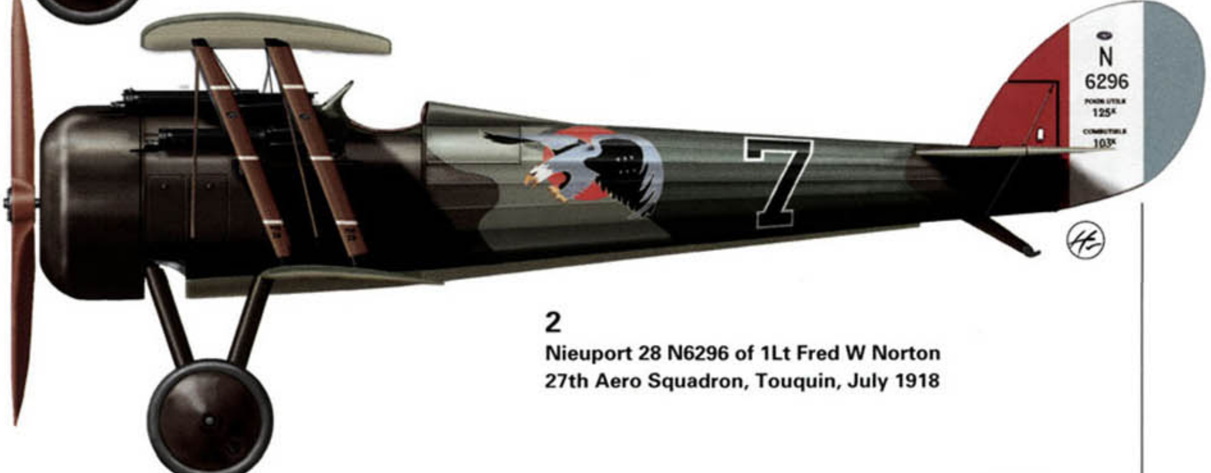
The 95th's 'B' Flight Nieuports return from a relatively uneventful patrol – save for poor weather conditions and visibility – on 22 June 1918 *(Greg VanWyngarden)*




N
6234
125K
103K
9

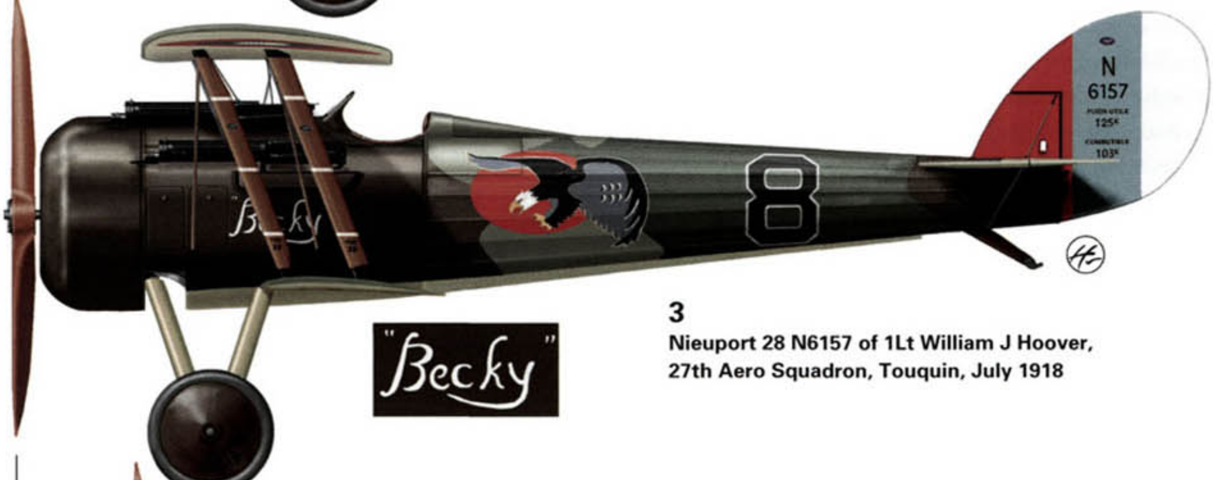
1

**Nieuport 28 N6234 of 1Lt Edward B Elliott, 27th Aero Squadron, Touquin, August 1918**


N
6296
125K
103K
7

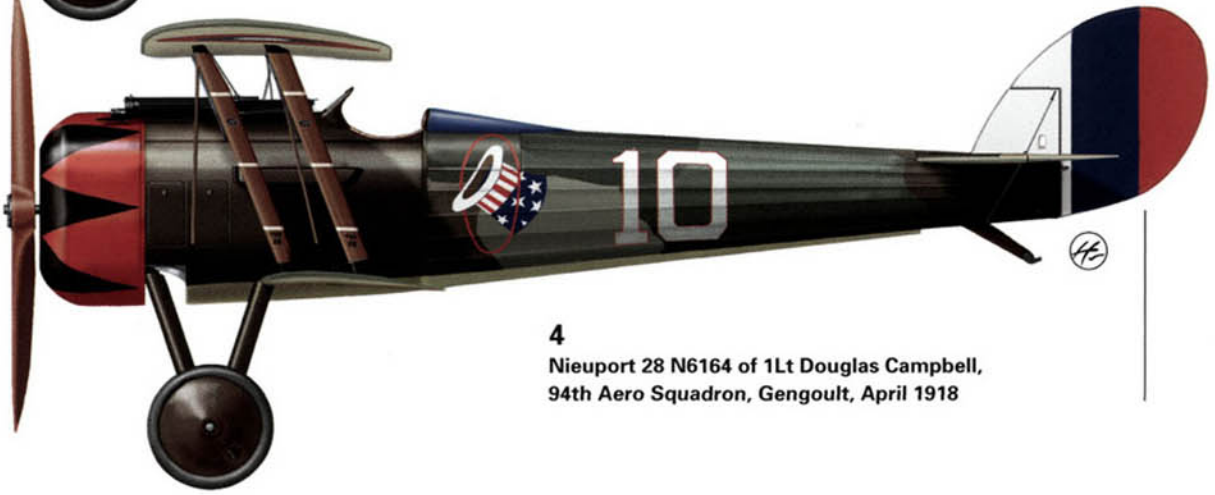
2

**Nieuport 28 N6296 of 1Lt Fred W Norton 27th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**


N
6157
125K
103K
8
Becky
"Becky"

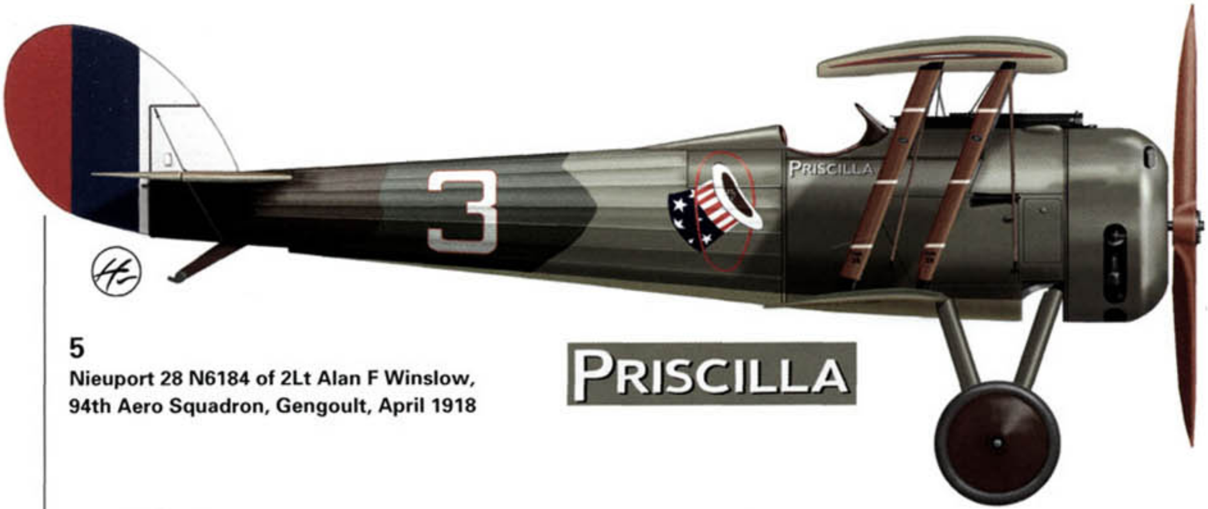
3

**Nieuport 28 N6157 of 1Lt William J Hoover, 27th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**

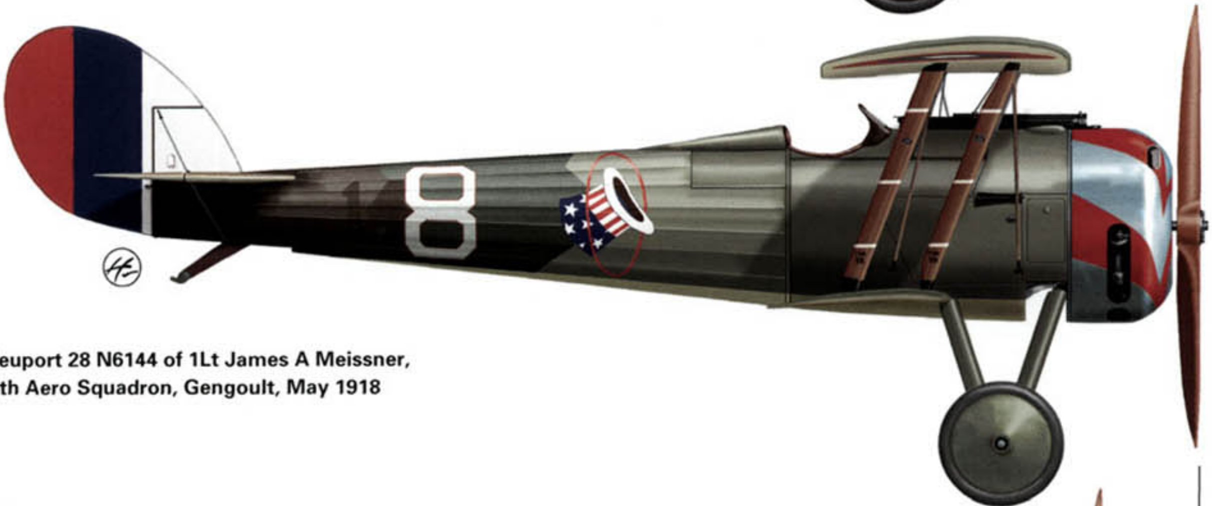


4

**Nieuport 28 N6164 of 1Lt Douglas Campbell, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, April 1918**



**5**
**Nieuport 28 N6184 of 2Lt Alan F Winslow, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, April 1918**



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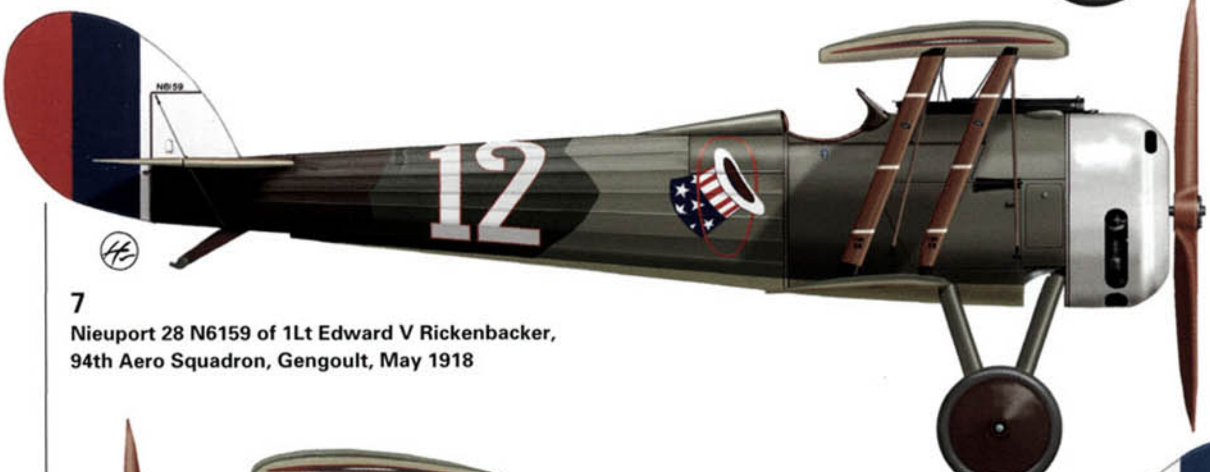
**Nieuport 28 N6144 of 1Lt James A Meissner, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**



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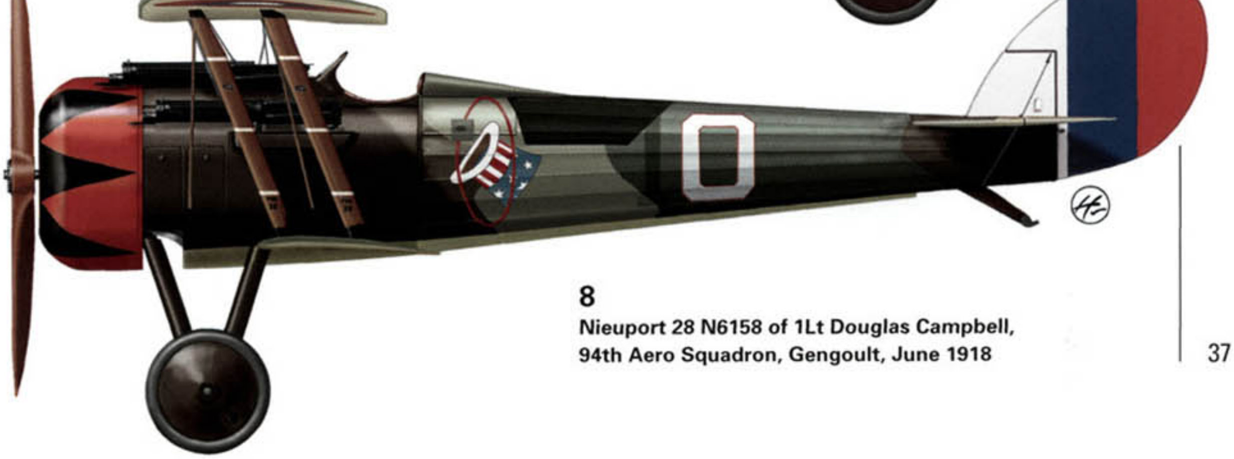
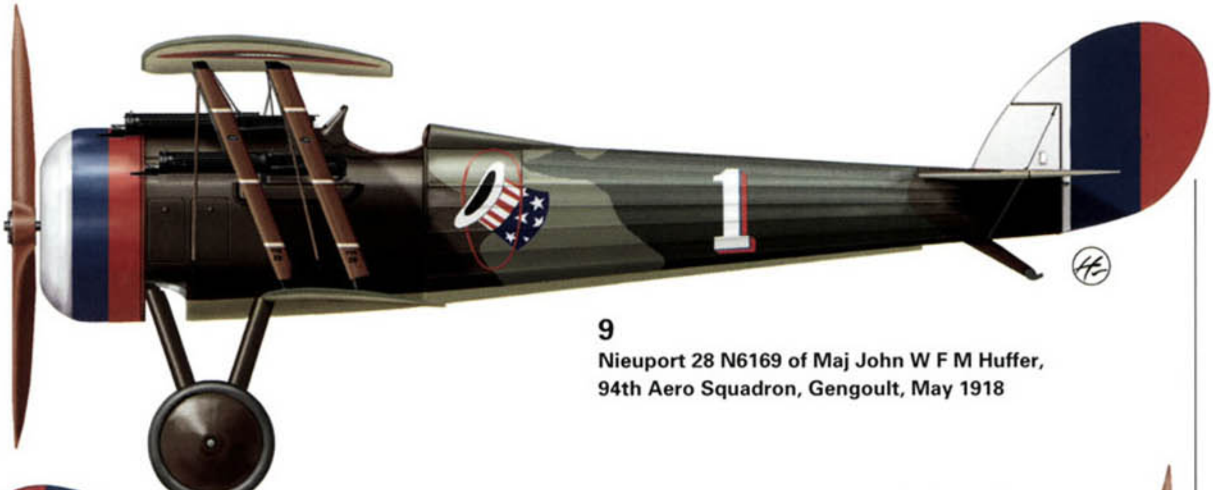
**Nieuport 28 N6159 of 1Lt Edward V Rickenbacker, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**



**8**
**Nieuport 28 N6158 of 1Lt Douglas Campbell, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, June 1918**



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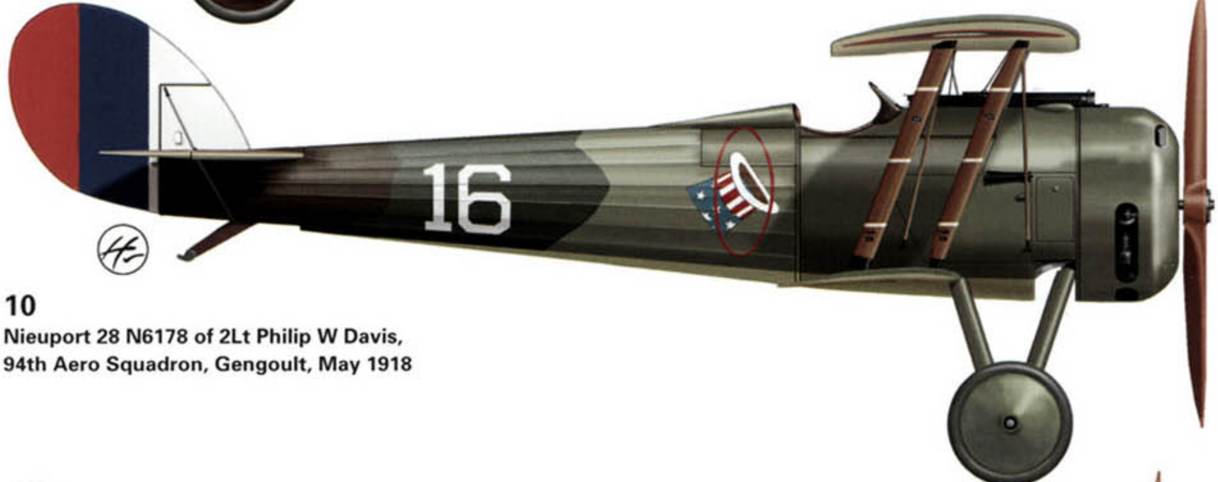
**Nieuport 28 N6169 of Maj John W F M Huffer, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**



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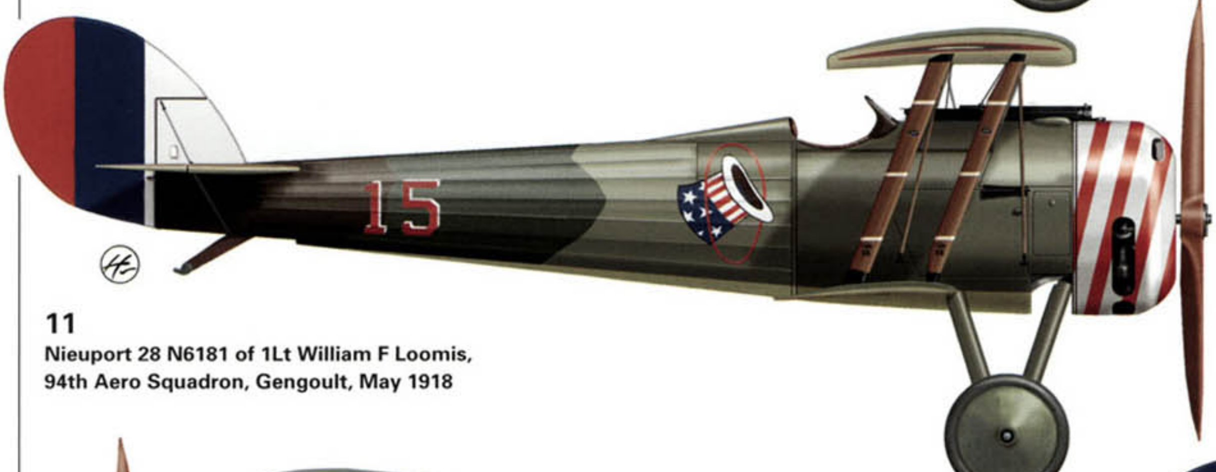
**Nieuport 28 N6178 of 2Lt Philip W Davis, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**



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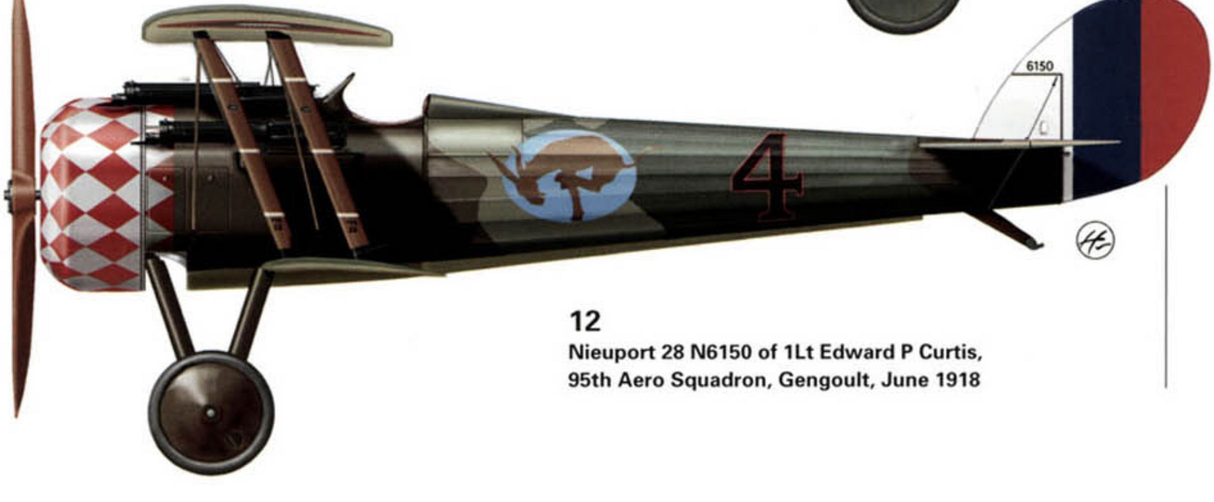
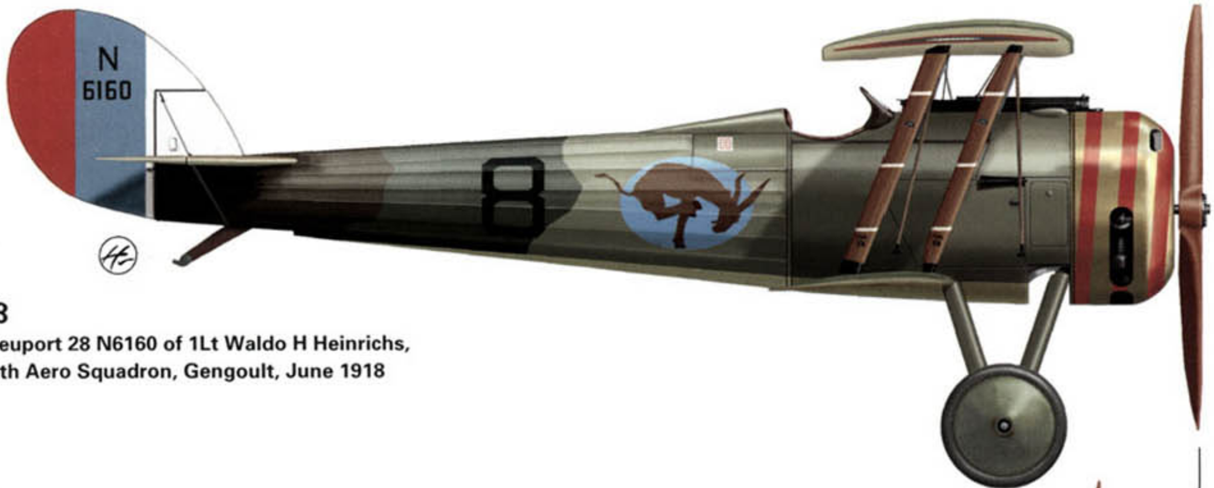
**Nieuport 28 N6181 of 1Lt William F Loomis, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**



**12**

**Nieuport 28 N6150 of 1Lt Edward P Curtis, 95th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, June 1918**



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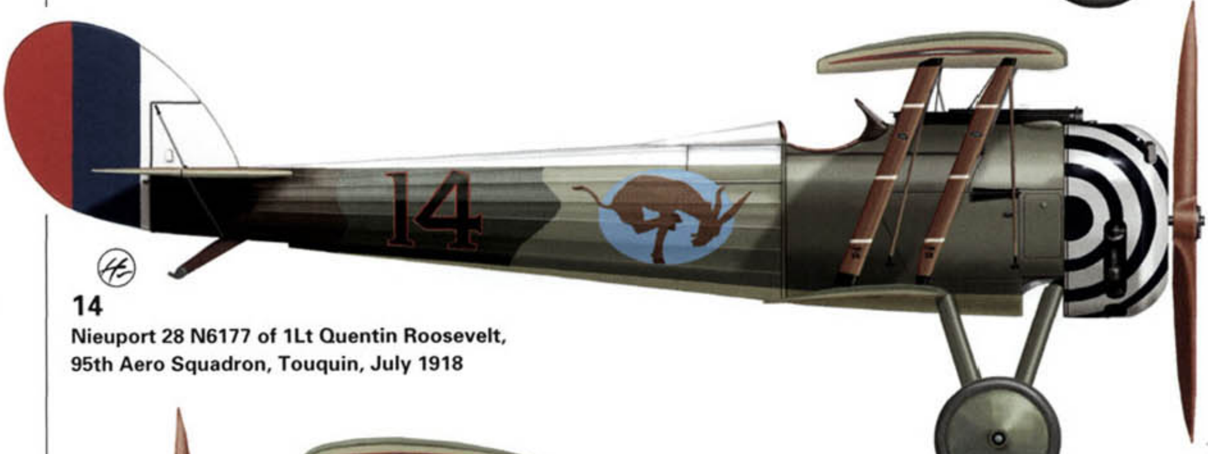
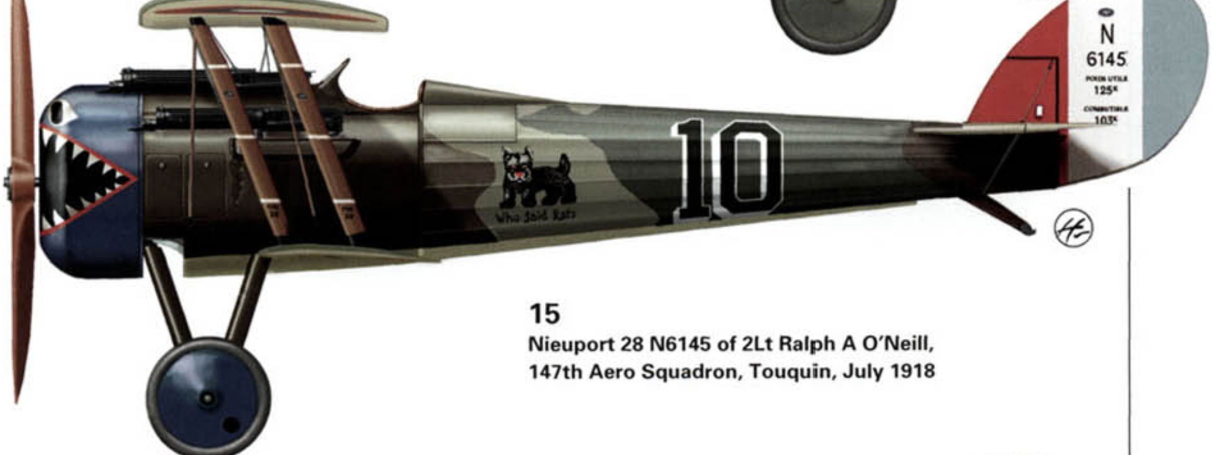
**Nieuport 28 N6160 of 1Lt Waldo H Heinrichs, 95th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, June 1918**



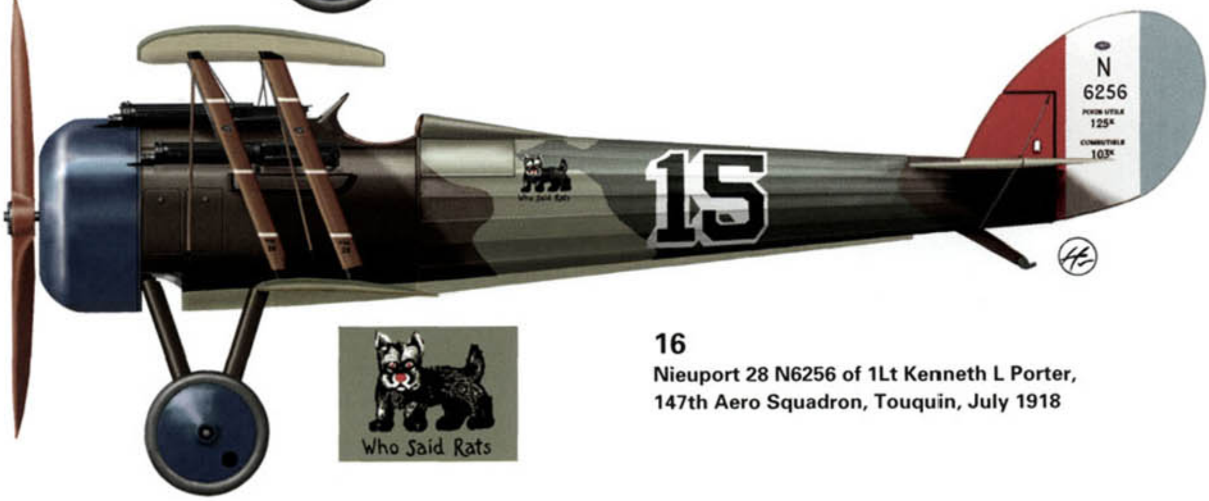
14

**Nieuport 28 N6177 of 1Lt Quentin Roosevelt, 95th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**


N
6145
POIDS UTILE
125K
COMBUSTIBLE
103K
10
Who Said Rats

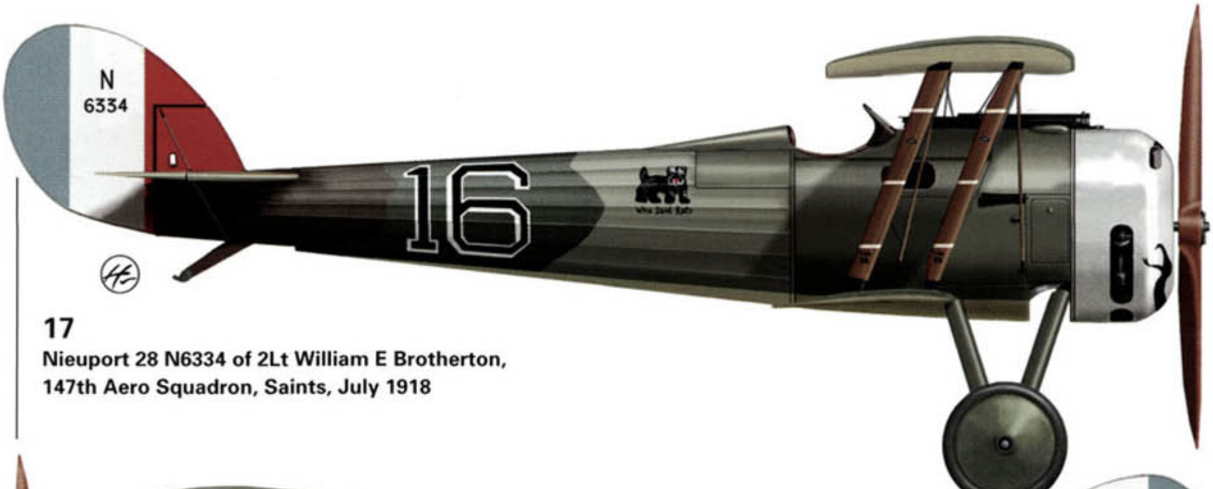
15

**Nieuport 28 N6145 of 2Lt Ralph A O'Neill, 147th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**


N
6256
POIDS UTILE
125K
COMBUSTIBLE
103K
15
Who Said Rats
Who Said Rats

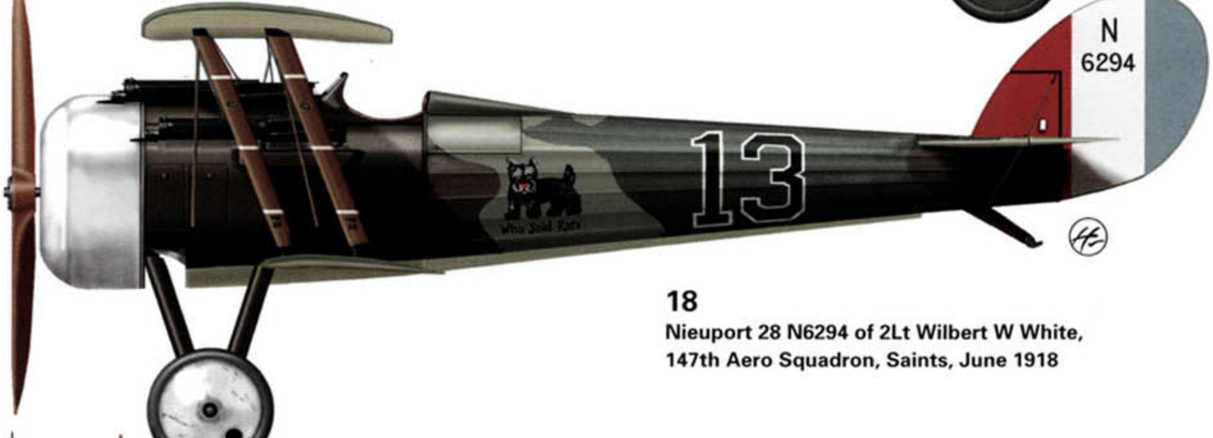
16

**Nieuport 28 N6256 of 1Lt Kenneth L Porter, 147th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**


N
6334
16
Who Said Rats

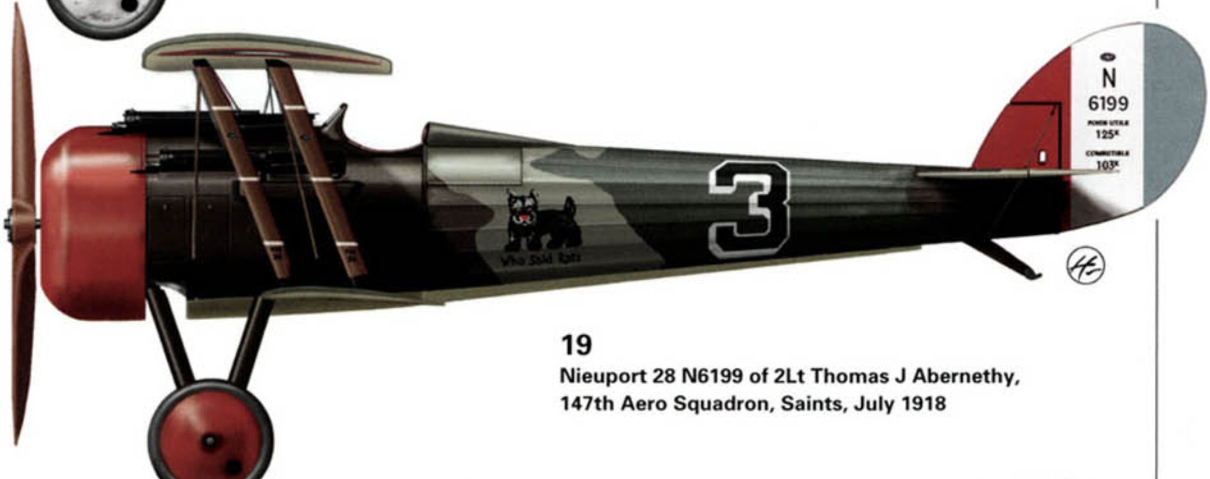
**17**

**Nieuport 28 N6334 of 2Lt William E Brotherton, 147th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**


N
6294
13
Who Said Rats

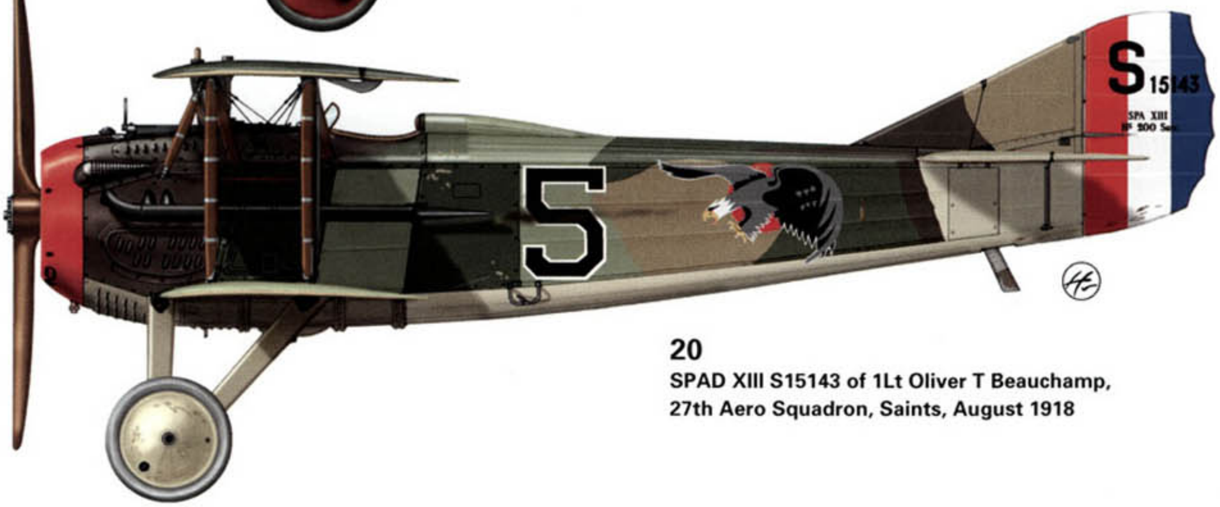
**18**

**Nieuport 28 N6294 of 2Lt Wilbert W White, 147th Aero Squadron, Saints, June 1918**


N
6199
POIDS UTILE
125K
COMBUSTIBLE
103K
3
Who Said Rats

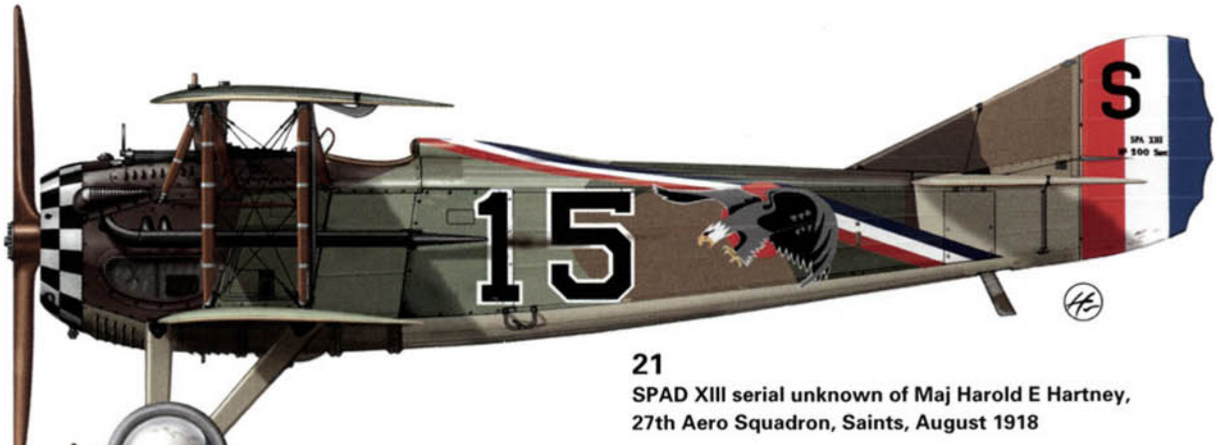
**19**

**Nieuport 28 N6199 of 2Lt Thomas J Abernethy, 147th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**


S 15143
SPA XIII
5

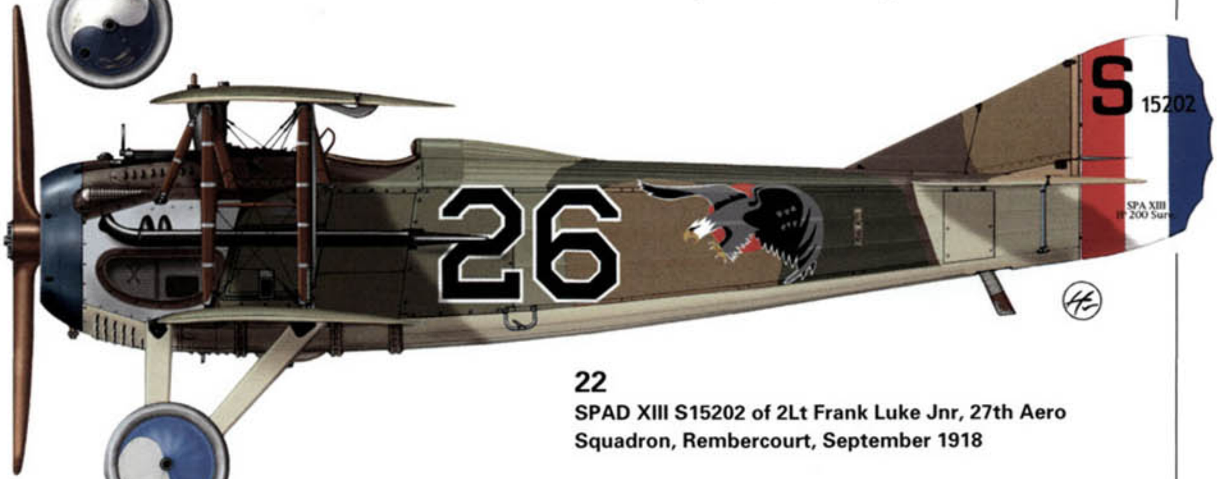
**20**

**SPAD XIII S15143 of 1Lt Oliver T Beauchamp, 27th Aero Squadron, Saints, August 1918**


S
SPA XIII
15

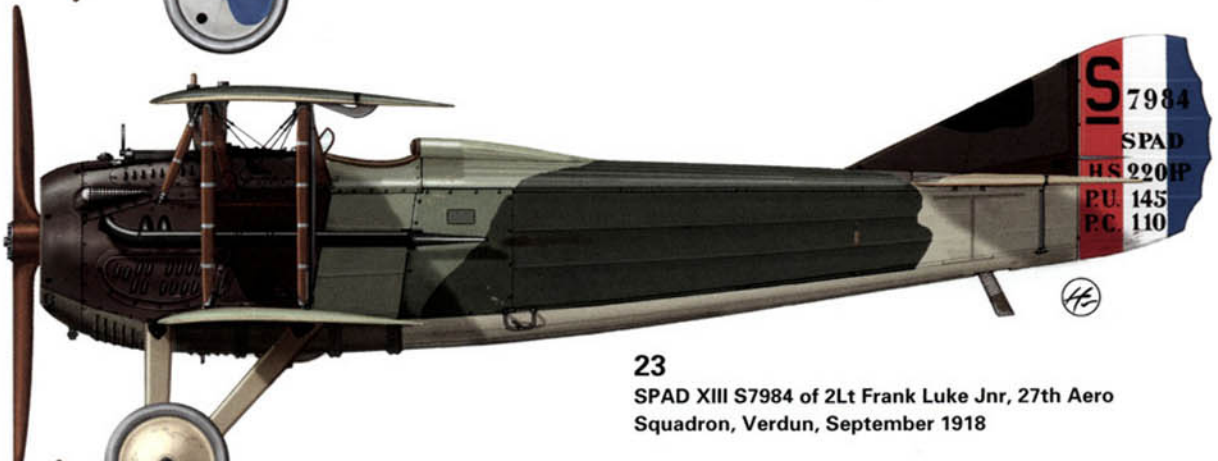
**21**

SPAD XIII serial unknown of Maj Harold E Hartney, 27th Aero Squadron, Saints, August 1918


S 15202
SPA XIII
IP 200 Sur
26

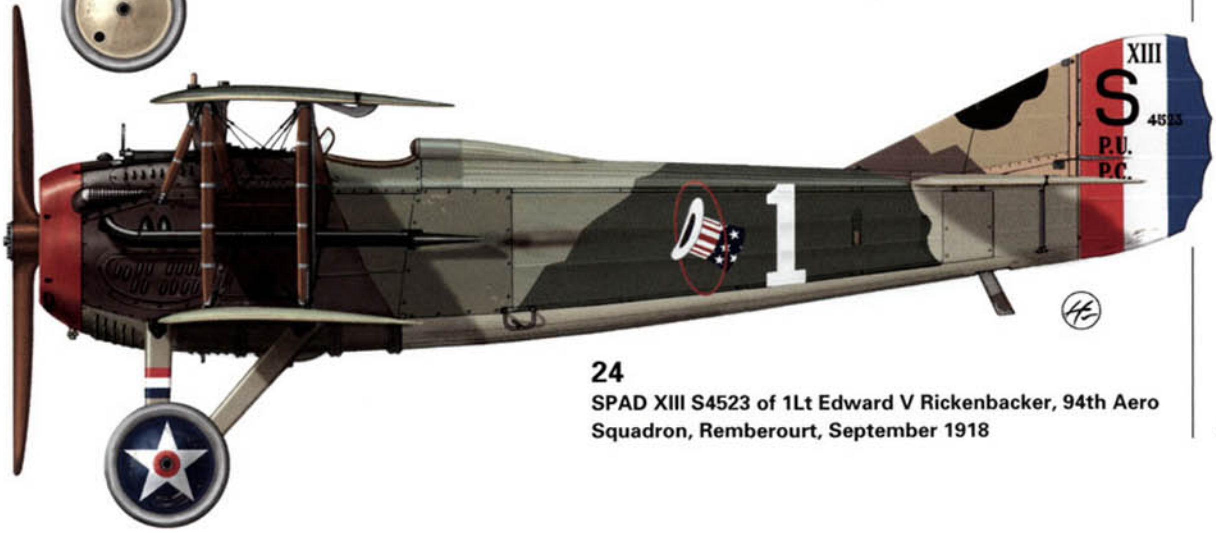
**22**

SPAD XIII S15202 of 2Lt Frank Luke Jnr, 27th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, September 1918


S 7984
SPAD
H.S. 220 HP
P.U. 145
P.C. 110

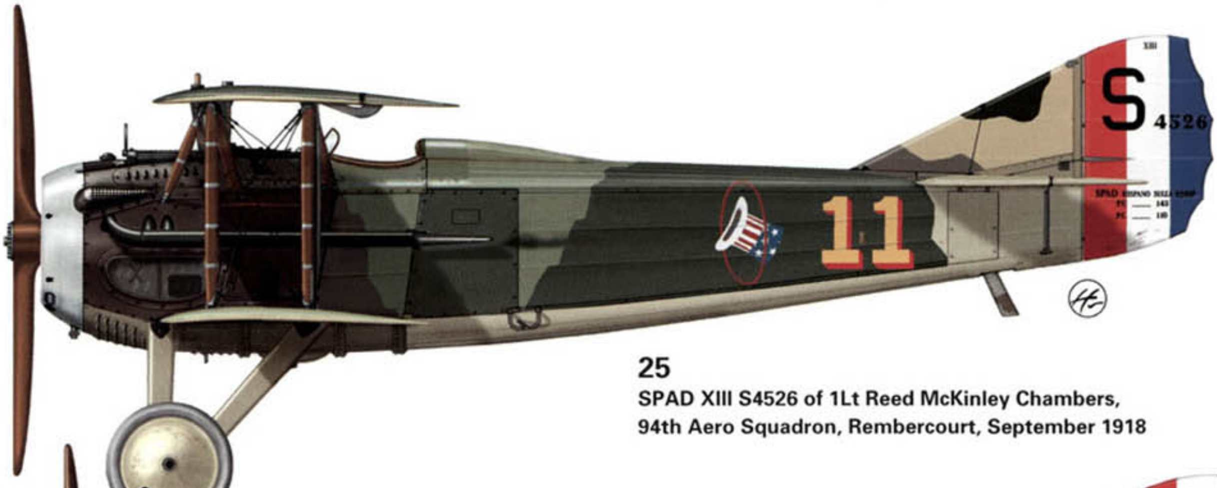
**23**

SPAD XIII S7984 of 2Lt Frank Luke Jnr, 27th Aero Squadron, Verdun, September 1918


XIII
S 4523
P.U.
P.C.
1

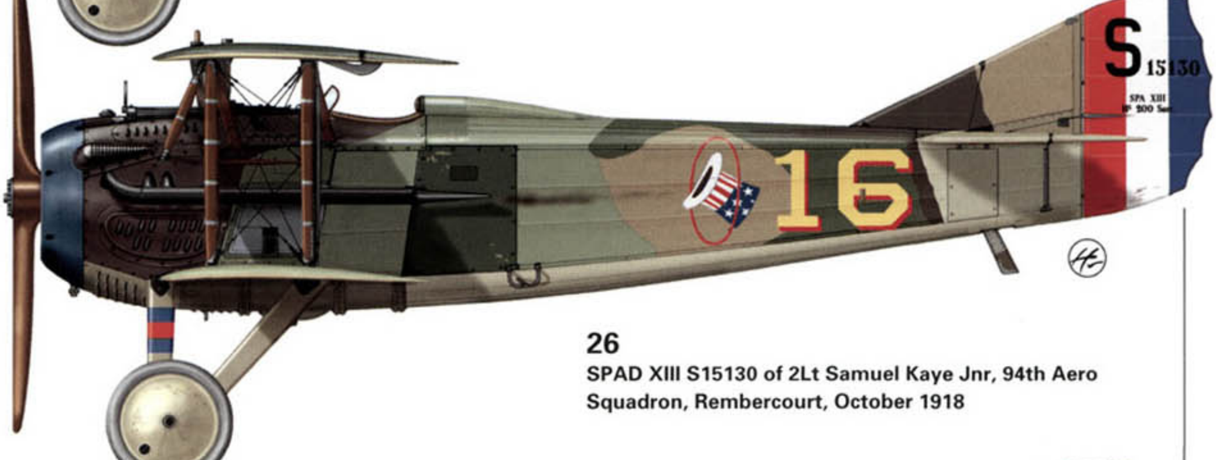
**24**

SPAD XIII S4523 of 1Lt Edward V Rickenbacker, 94th Aero Squadron, Remberourt, September 1918


XIII
S
4526
11
P.U. 145
P.C. 110

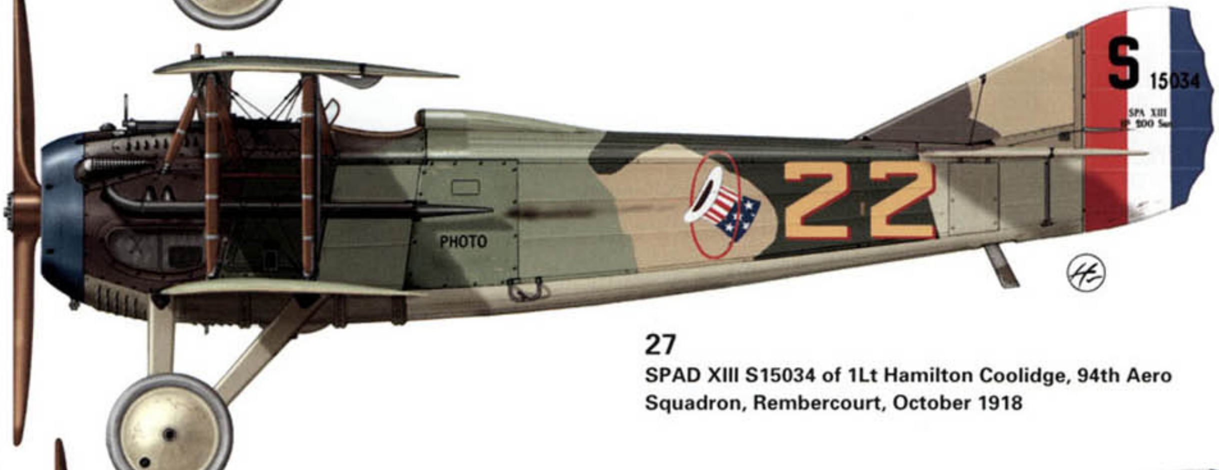
**25**

**SPAD XIII S4526 of 1Lt Reed McKinley Chambers, 94th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, September 1918**


S
15130
SPA XIII
16

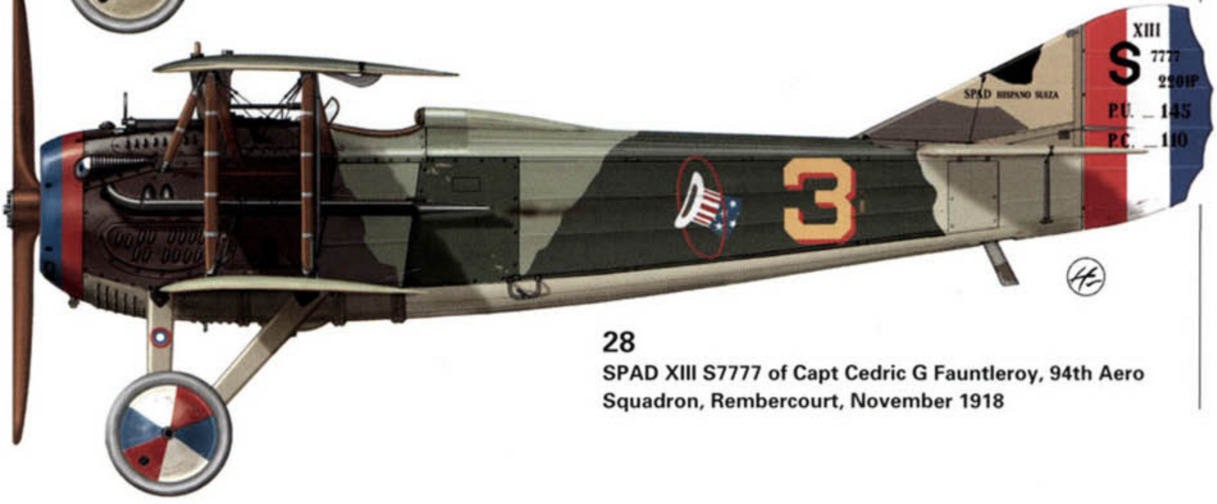
**26**

**SPAD XIII S15130 of 2Lt Samuel Kaye Jnr, 94th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**


S
15034
SPA XIII
22
PHOTO

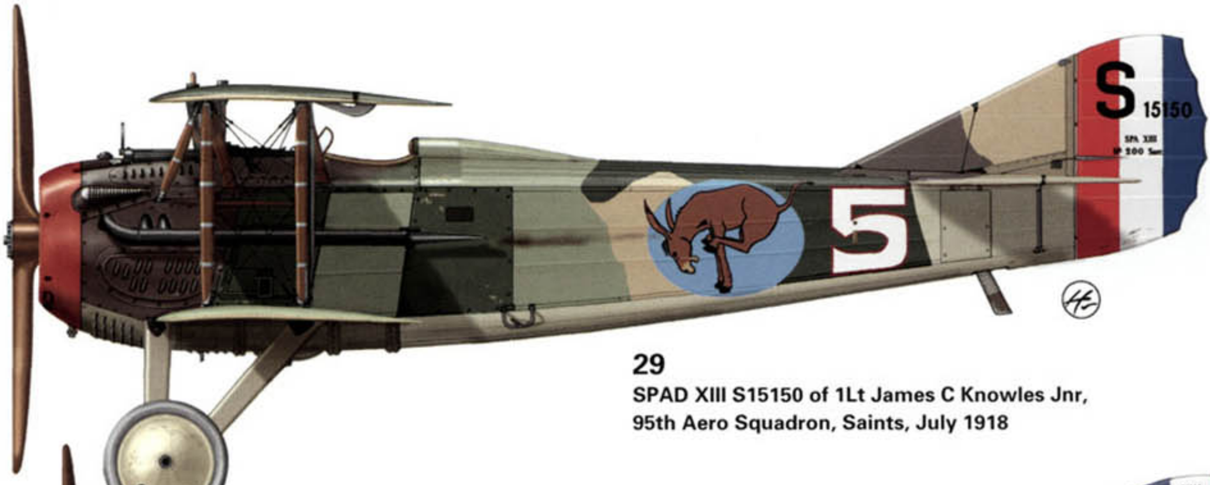
**27**

**SPAD XIII S15034 of 1Lt Hamilton Coolidge, 94th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**


XIII
S
7777
220HP
P.U. 145
P.C. 110
SPAD HISPANO SUIZA
3

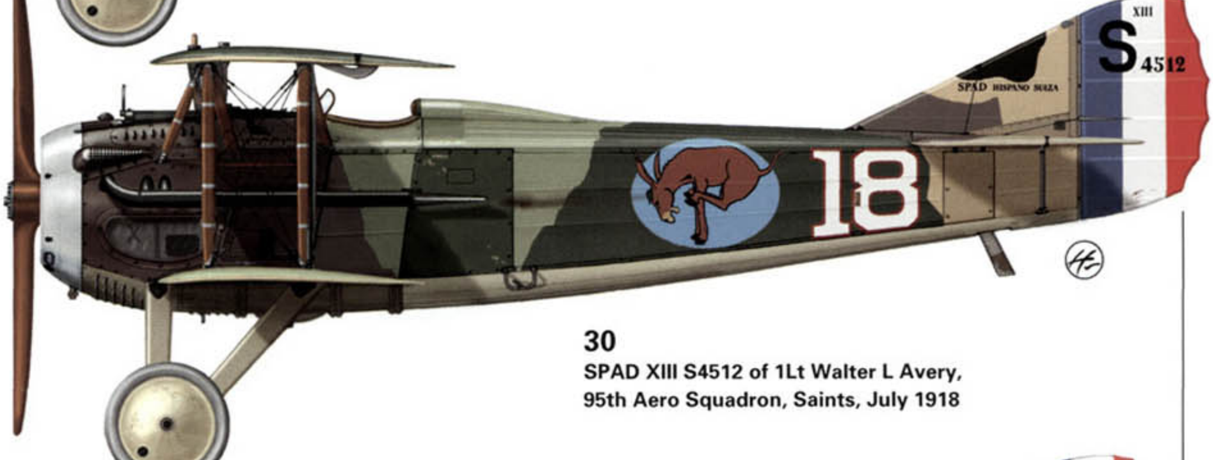
**28**

**SPAD XIII S7777 of Capt Cedric G Fauntleroy, 94th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, November 1918**


S 15150
SPA XIII
5

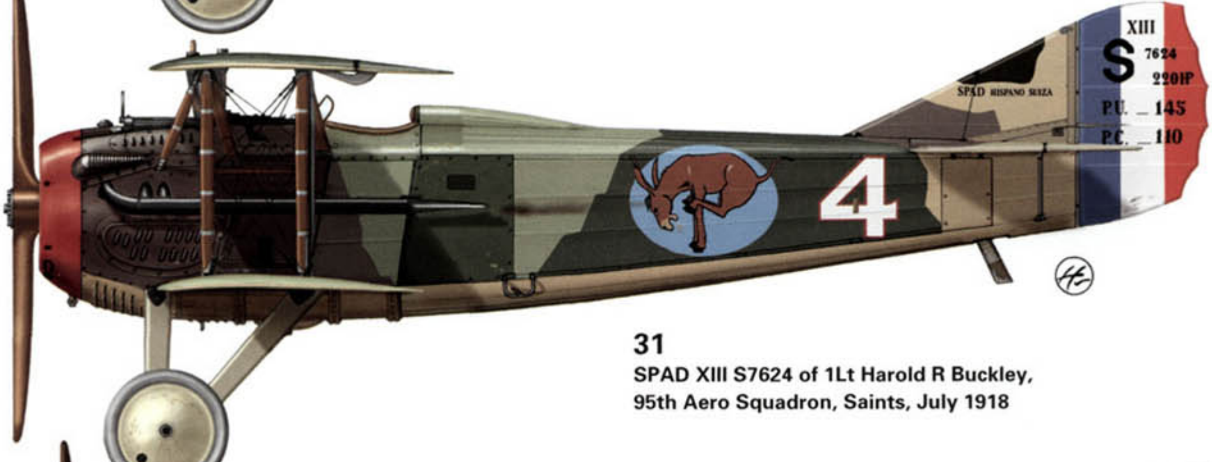
29

**SPAD XIII S15150 of 1Lt James C Knowles Jnr, 95th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**


XIII
S 4512
SPAD HISPANO SUIZA
18

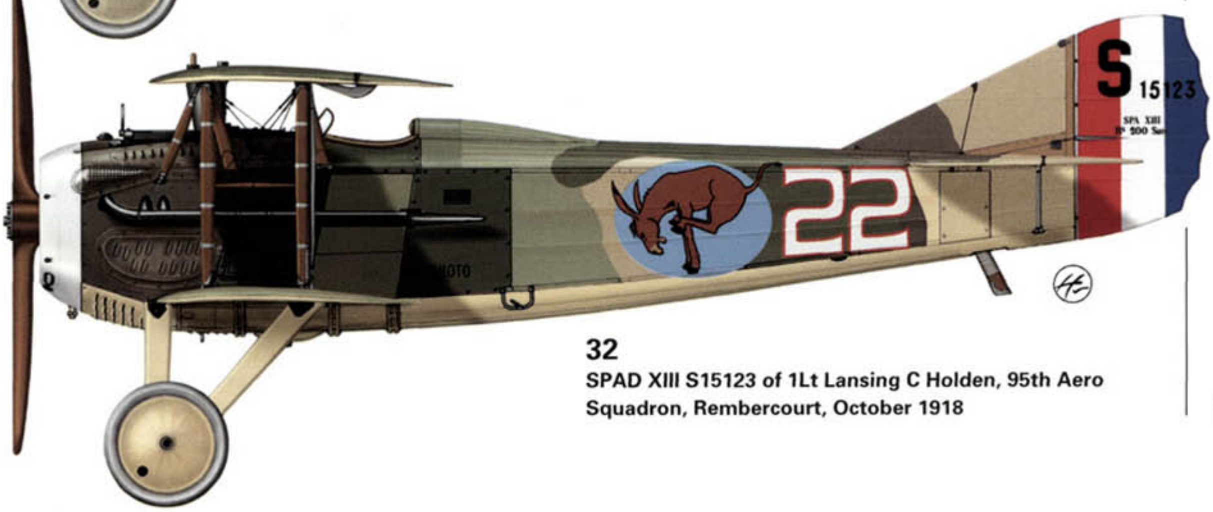
30

**SPAD XIII S4512 of 1Lt Walter L Avery, 95th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**


XIII
S 7624
220HP
P.U. _ 145
P.C. _ 110
SPAD HISPANO SUIZA
4

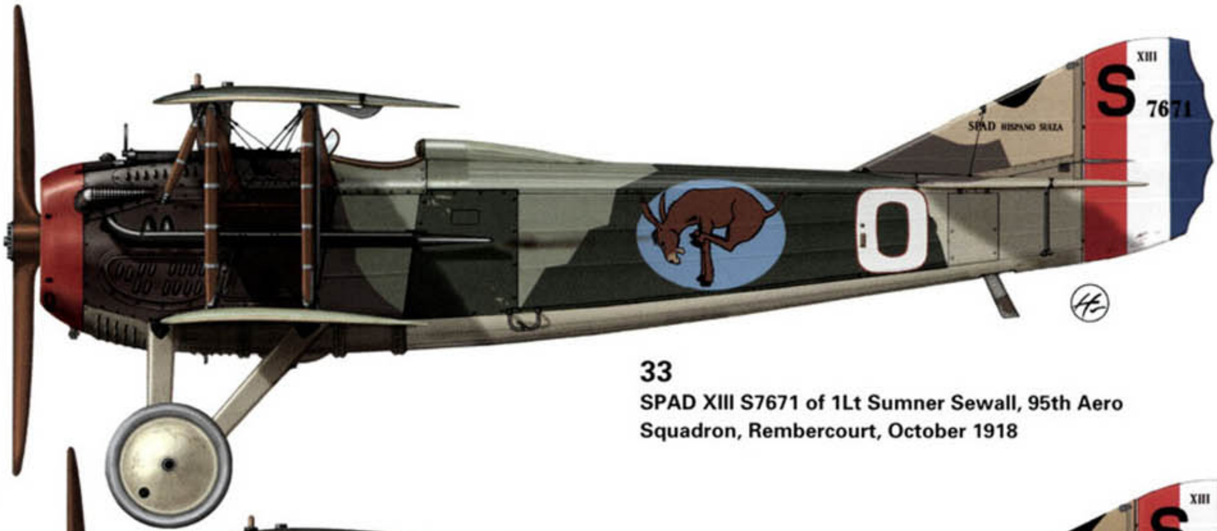
31

**SPAD XIII S7624 of 1Lt Harold R Buckley, 95th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**


S 15123
SPA XIII
22

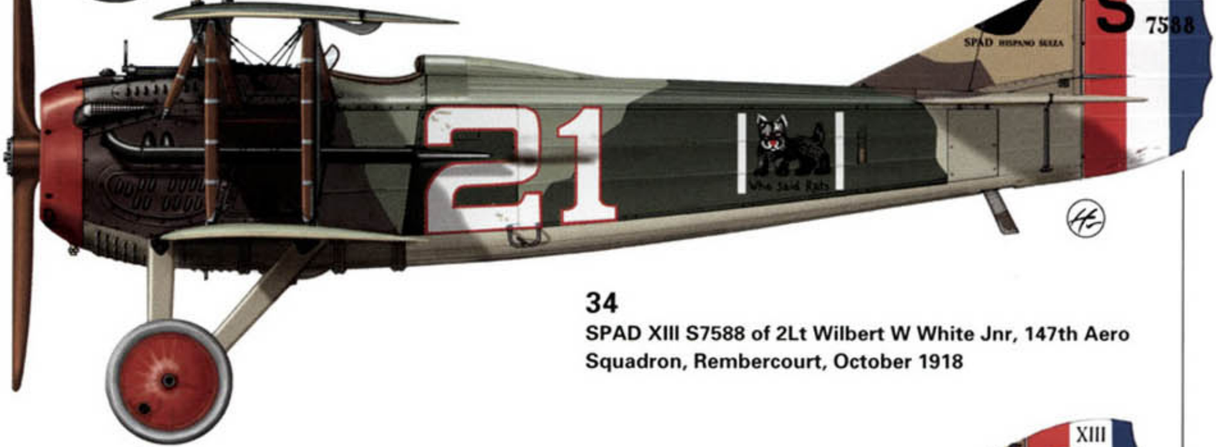
32

**SPAD XIII S15123 of 1Lt Lansing C Holden, 95th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**


XIII
S 7671
SPAD HISPANO SUIZA
0

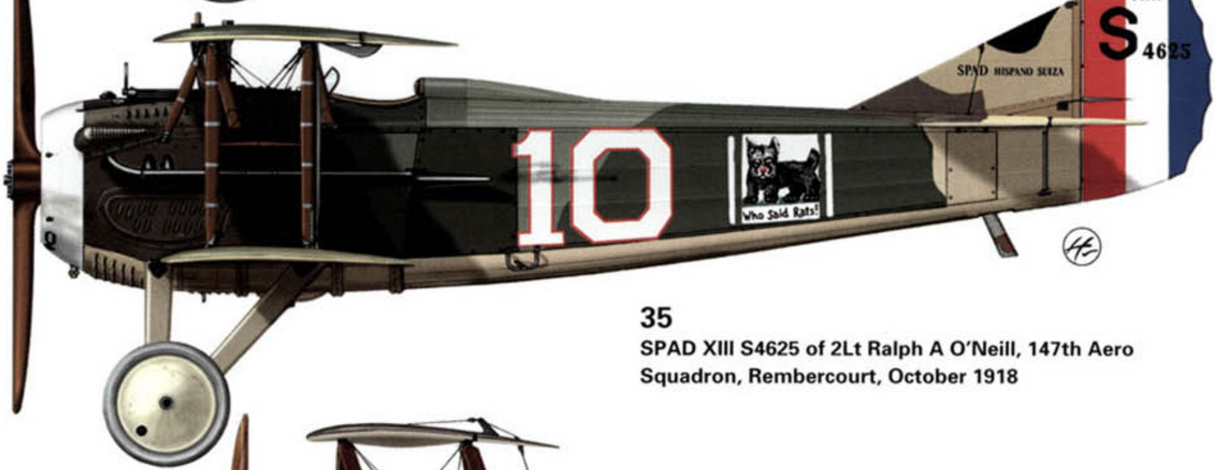
**33**

SPAD XIII S7671 of 1Lt Sumner Sewall, 95th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918


XIII
S 7588
SPAD HISPANO SUIZA
21
Who Said Rats

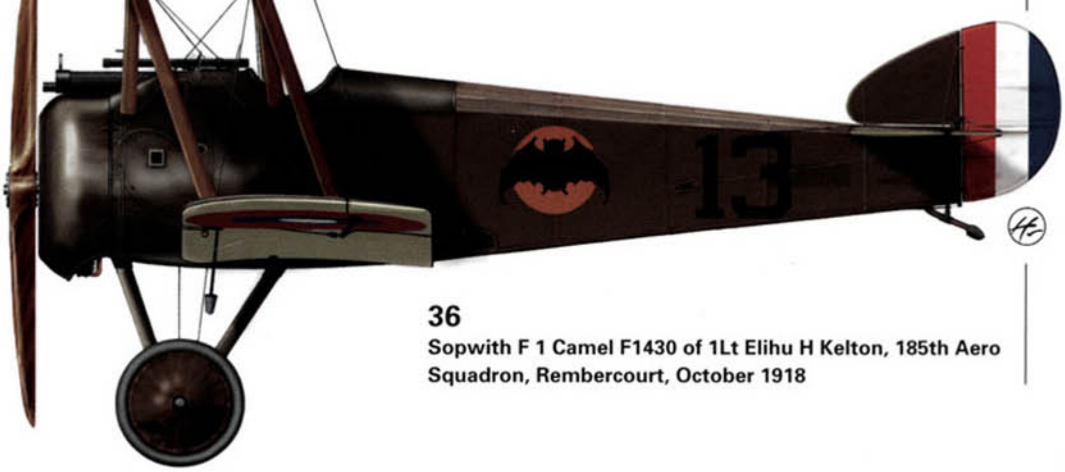
**34**

SPAD XIII S7588 of 2Lt Wilbert W White Jnr, 147th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918


XIII
S 4625
SPAD HISPANO SUIZA
10
Who Said Rats!

**35**

SPAD XIII S4625 of 2Lt Ralph A O'Neill, 147th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918



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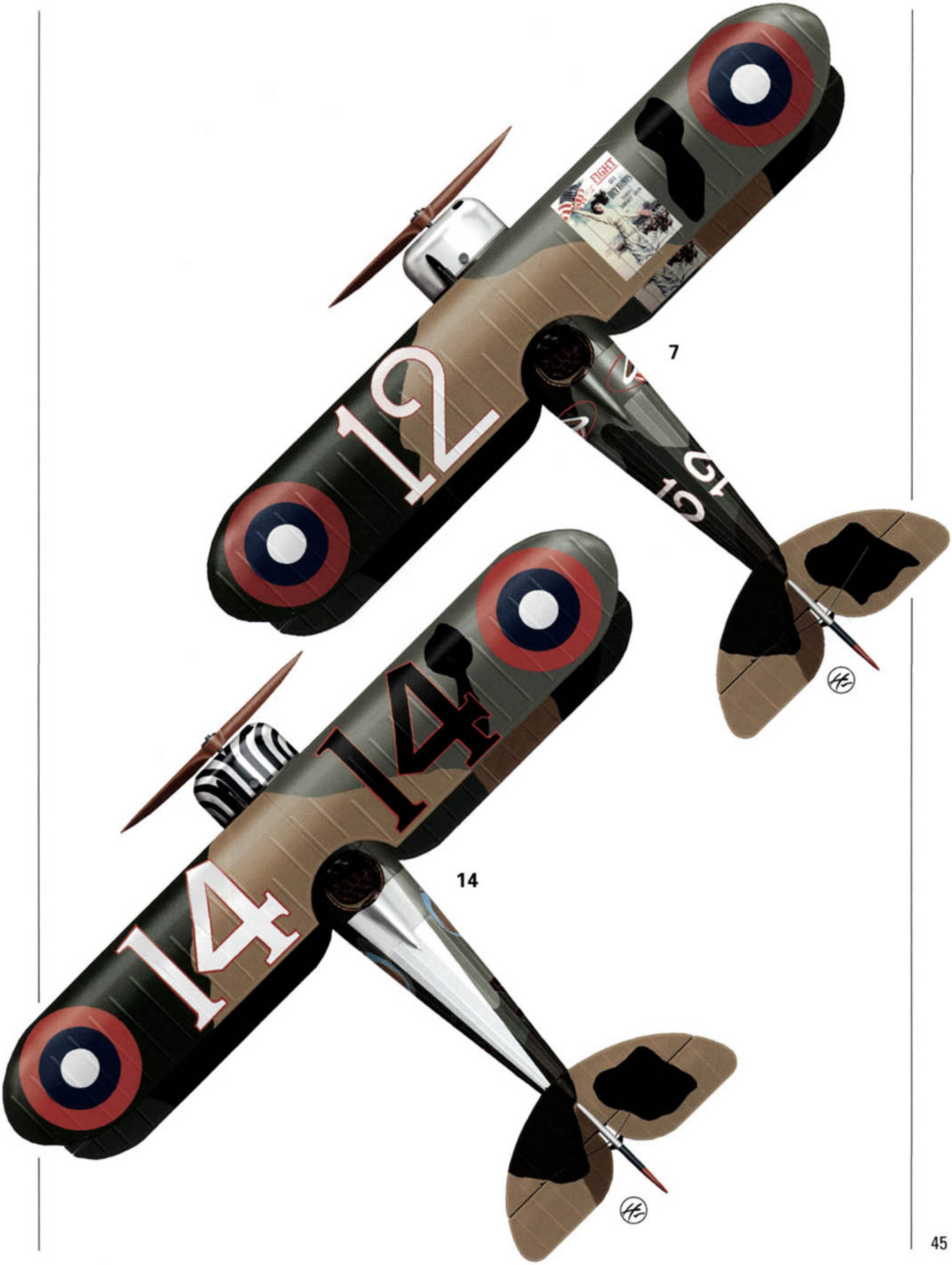
Sopwith F 1 Camel F1430 of 1Lt Elihu H Kelton, 185th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918



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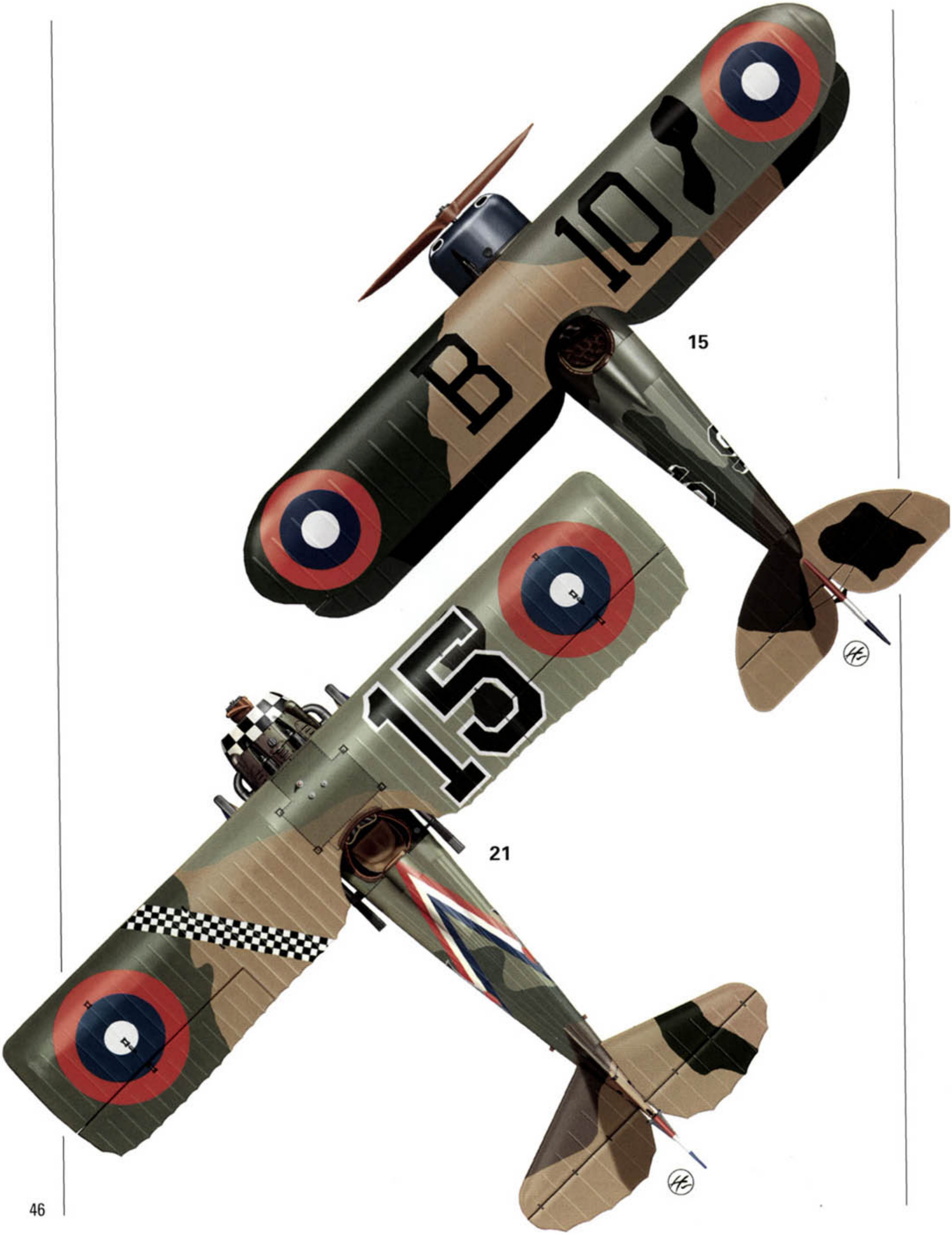

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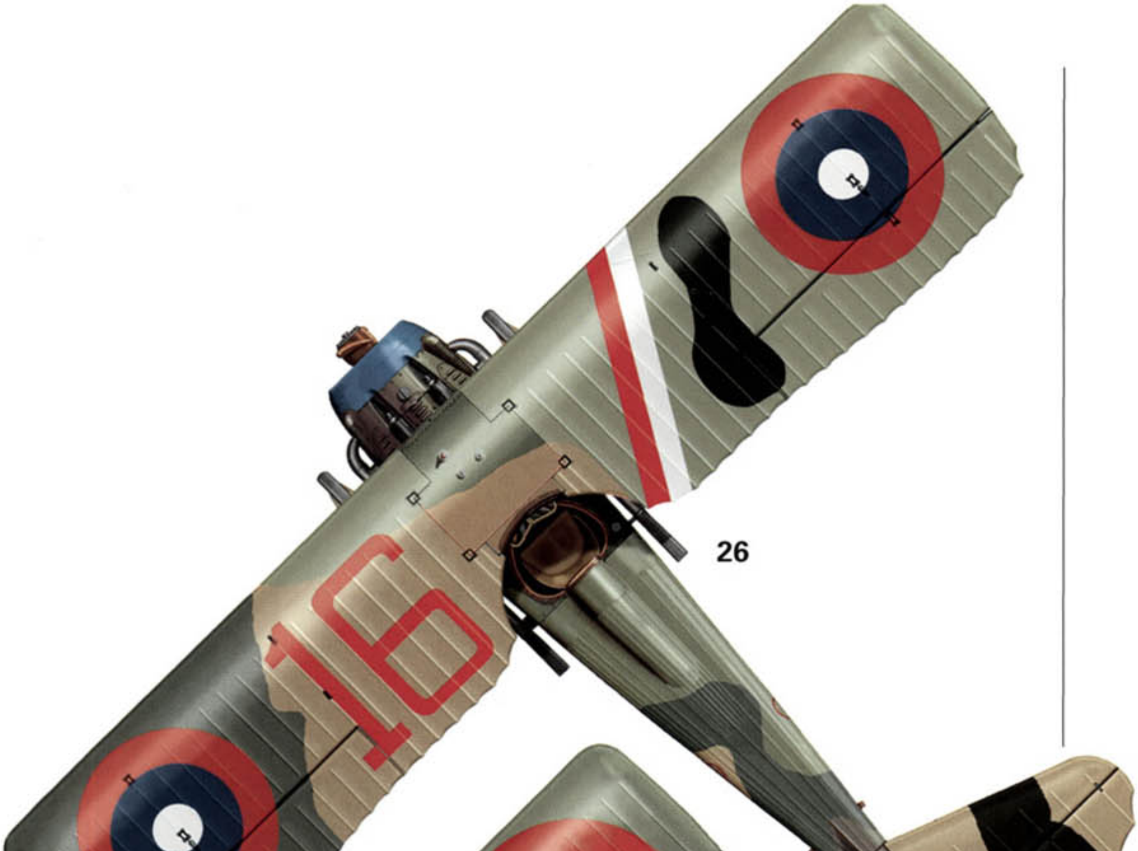

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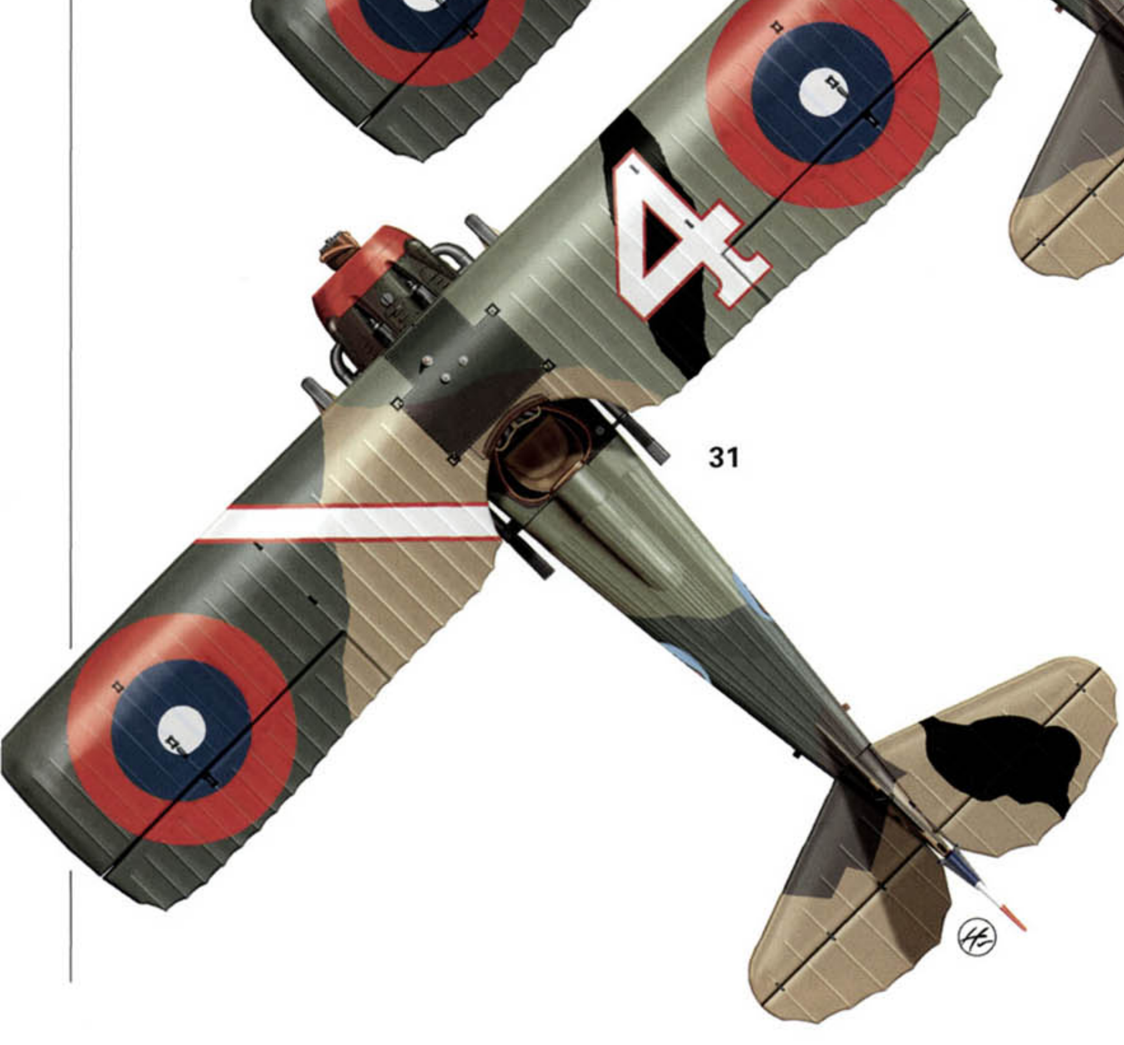

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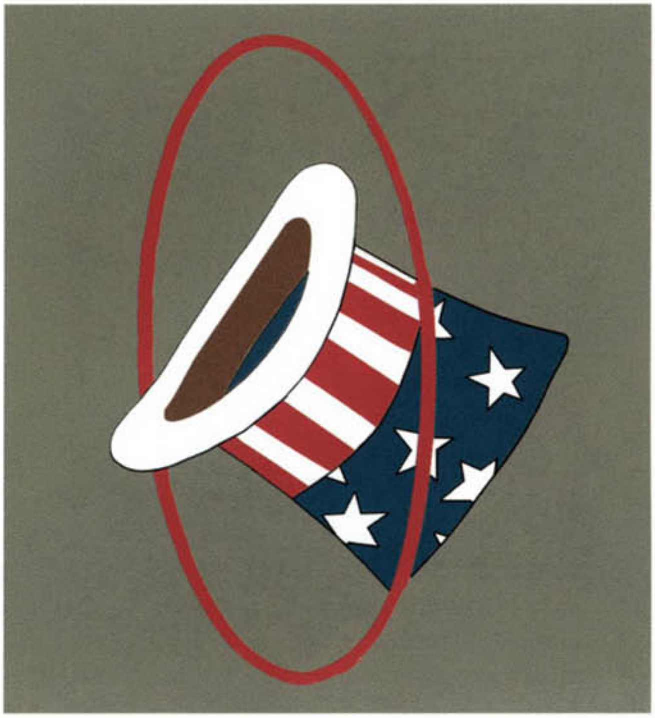
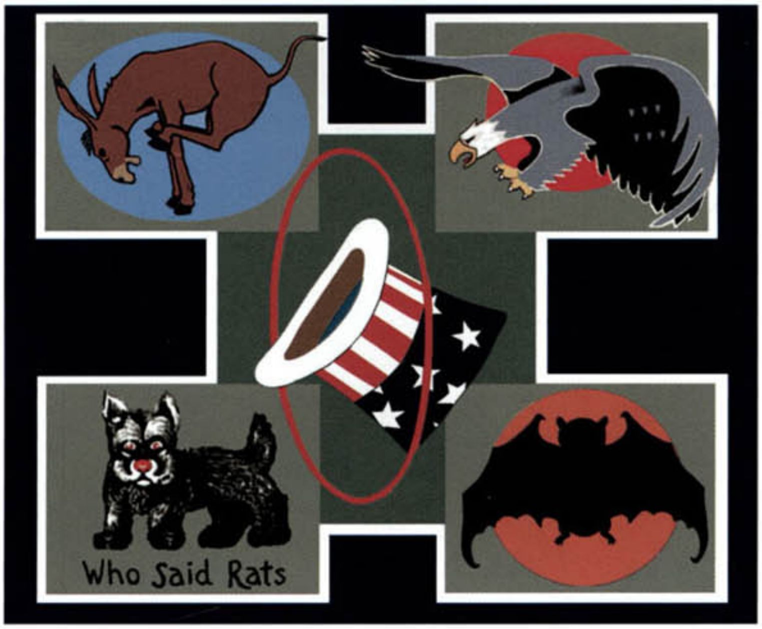


**1**

Squadron insignia for the 94th Aero Squadron



**2**

Squadron insignia for all five units in the 1st Pursuit Group

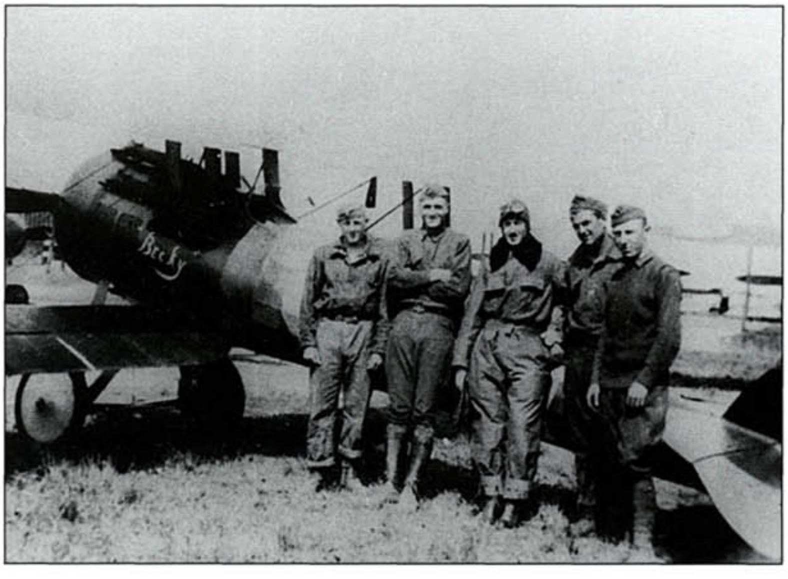
# FLYING CIRCUS OVER CHÂTEAU THIERRY

On 28 June the 1st Pursuit Group moved to Touquin aerodrome, 20 miles south of Château Thierry. The Americans had given a good account of themselves thus far, but now, in the face of a pivotal enemy offensive expected in the Marne region, they would be facing the best aircraft and airmen in the *Luftstreitskräfte*. Instead of the Albatros and Pfalz scouts encountered in the Toul sector, their principal opponent would be the Fokker D VII – arguably the best fighter of the war – operated by all three *Jagdgeschwader* (fighter wings), each made up of four seasoned squadrons, operating along the Marne.

JG I, the original 'Flying Circus' of the late Manfred *Freiherr* von Richthofen, was now led by Oblt Hermann Göring and made up of *Jastas* 4, 6, 10 and 11. JG II, commanded by Oblt Rudolf Berthold, consisted of *Jastas* 12, 13, 15 and 19. JG III, led by Oblt Bruno Loerzer, had *Jastas* 2 'Boelcke', 26, 27 and 36. Between these units and a supporting cast of other experienced *Jagdstaffeln* facing it in this sector, the 1st Pursuit Group was about to be thrust into the major leagues.

On 1 July the 1st Pursuit had its first encounter – and a bitter taste of reality – when the 94th ran into a flight of Fokker D VIIs over Charly and 1Lt Harold H Tittmann came down in Allied lines severely wounded. The Germans apparently overestimated just how much damage they had inflicted on this occasion, because Nieuports were credited to *Jasta* 66 aces Ltns Werner Preuss and Arthur Laumann.

On the 2nd, eight Nieuports of the 27th, led by 1Lt Donald Hudson, took off at 0615 hrs, and an hour later encountered seven Fokker D VIIs of *Jasta* 10. In the melée that followed, the 27th pilots came away with the



**1Lt Bill Hoover of the 27th, flanked by his groundcrew, poses alongside his Nieuport 28 N6157 'Black 8'. Hoover shared in two victories, and may have himself been claimed by a member of *Jasta* 10 during an engagement on 2 July 1918. He would add a third to his tally on 27 September (*Jon Guttman*)**

N
6234
POIDS UVILE
125
COMBUSTIBLE
103

**1Lt Fred W Norton and 'Jerry', the 27th Aero Squadron's mascot, pose with Nieuport N6234. This aircraft was actually assigned to 1Lt Edward B Elliott, who was killed on 2 July 1918 – one of the 1st Pursuit Group's first casualties of the Château Thierry campaign. Norton would die later that same month (*Michael Hamaty via Charles Woolley*)**

impression that their Nieuports could out-climb and outmanoeuvre the Fokkers, but that the Germans had more experience and the Americans were further handicapped by frequent gun jams.

Nevertheless, the 27th claimed four enemy aeroplanes destroyed, of which two were jointly credited to1Lts Hudson, Alfred A Grant, William J Hoover, Frederick W Norton and Ralph S Schmidt, and 2Lt John MacArthur. *Jasta* 10 recorded no losses, claiming three Nieuports in return – two by Ltn Erich Löwenhardt of *Jasta* 10 and one by Ltn Fritz Friedrichs. One of the Americans, 1Lt Edward B Elliott, was indeed killed, while two others, Hoover and MacArthur, seemed to go down, but had in fact made it back to Touquin.

One additional loss was 2Lt Walter B Wanamaker, who was trying to drive Löwenhardt off a squadronmate's tail when he in turn fell prey to a new arrival. Ltn Ernst Udet, CO of *Jasta* 4, upon spotting flak bursts indicating Allied intruders, took off and joined the fight just in time to aid Löwenhardt. Struck by Udet, the Nieuport spun down, pulled up, then wobbled and crashed.

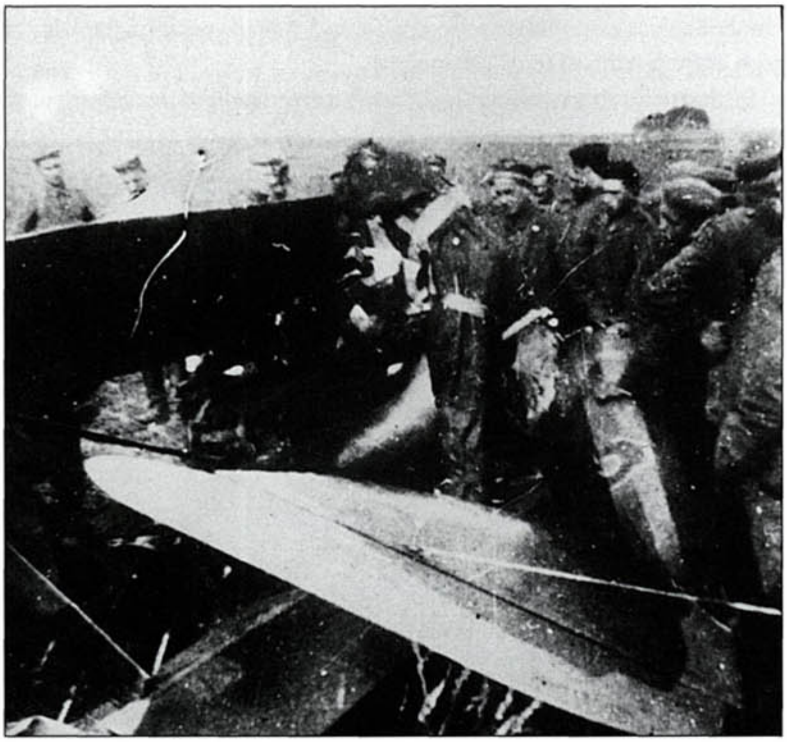
Udet landed nearby to see his opponent crawl painfully from the wreckage, giving no response when he addressed him in French. Offering him a cigarette, Udet learned that he came from Akron, Ohio, and summoned medics when Wanamaker pointed to his thigh and casually remarked, 'Broken'. Informed that three other Americans had gone down,

**Suffering a broken leg after being shot down on 2 July 1918, 2Lt Walter B Wanamaker of the 27th Aero Squadron awaits transport to hospital and later a PoW camp (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

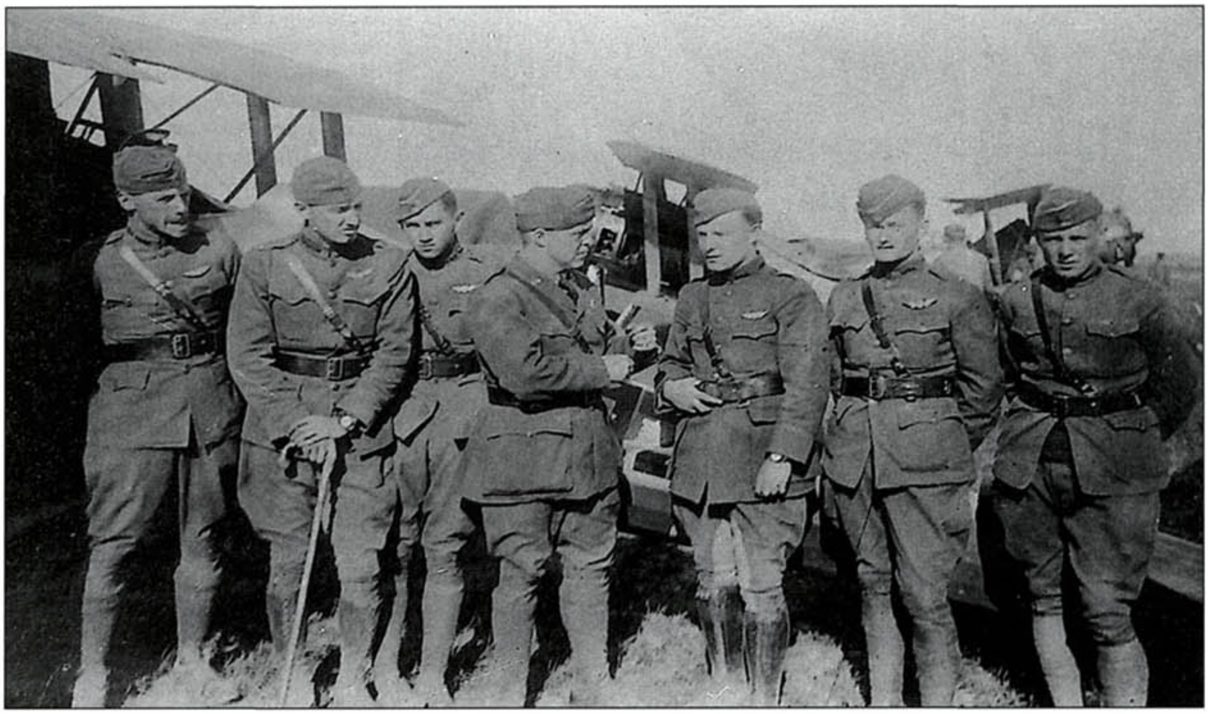
Wanamaker remarked, 'Well, we're having a great morning. But don't worry. We'll do better'.

Deciding to take a souvenir of his first American, Udet cut the serial number, N6347, from Wanamaker's rudder. Later, while stunt flying at the Cleveland National Air Races on 6 September 1931, Udet was reunited with Wanamaker – then a judge in Akron – and returned the trophy to him. It can still be seen on display in the US Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio.

True to Wanamaker's words to Udet, the 147th Aero Squadron did do better at 1730 hrs that afternoon, when nine of its Nieuports battled 12 Fokkers near Château Thierry. 2Lt Ralph A O'Neill was awarded the DSC for his heroism during the fight, although no corresponding German loss has been found for the Fokker that was jointly credited to



**To the victor go the spoils. Ltn Ernst Udet of *Jasta* 4 examines the wreckage of Wanamaker's Nieuport N6347 'Black 3', from which the German ace cut the serial number from the rudder – and returned it to Wanamaker 13 years later (*US Air Force Museum via Greg VanWyngarden*)**



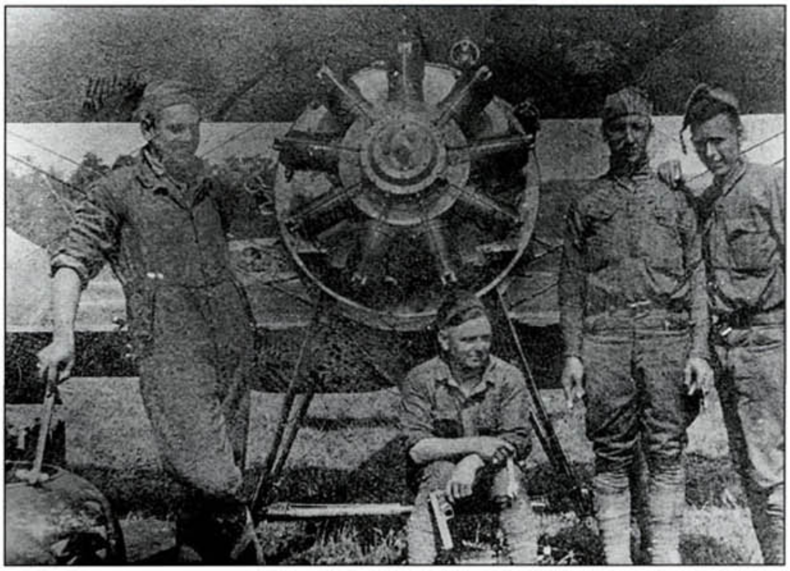
**Pilots of the 147th Aero Squadron at Saints aerodrome in early July 1918. They are, from left to right, 2Lts Ralph A O'Neill, John H Stevens, Kenneth L Porter, Maxwell O Parry, Cleveland W McDermott, Tyler C Bronson and Joseph C Raible (*Alan Roesler*)**

him and 2Lts Maxwell O Parry, Kenneth Lee Porter, John H Stevens, Tyler C Bronson and Cleveland W McDermott.

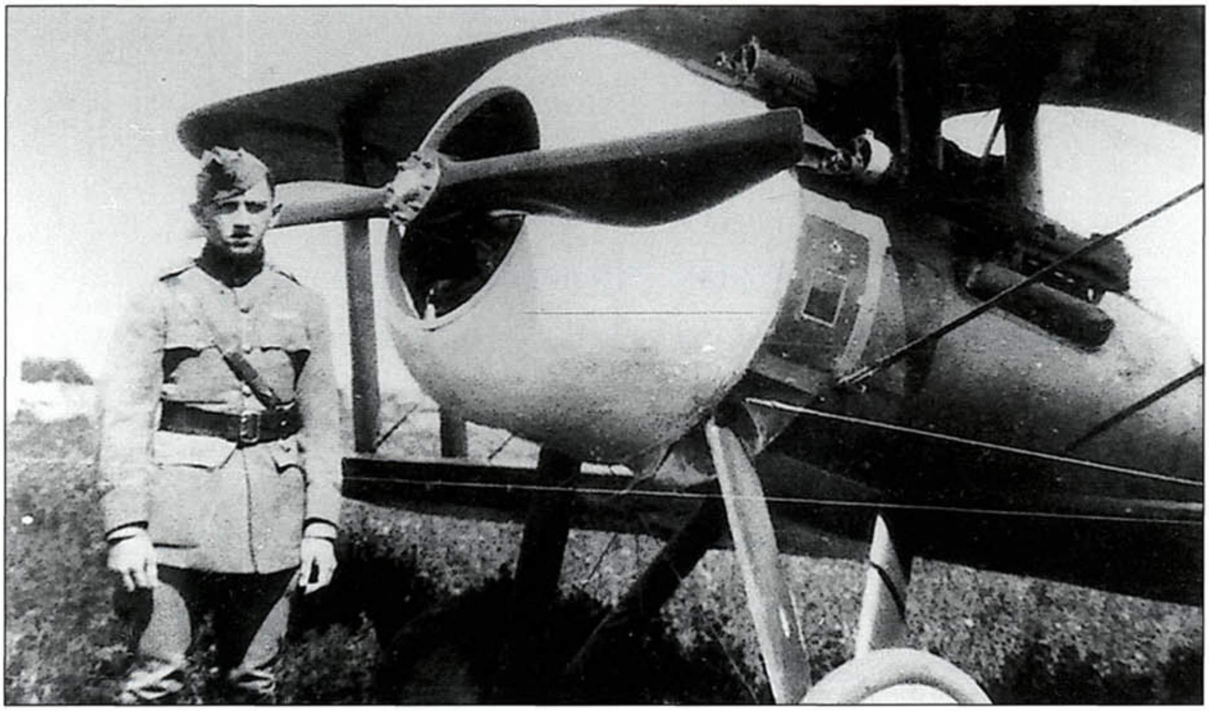
On 3 July the 1st Pursuit Group received the following – somewhat belated – intelligence from its new assigned command, the French VI *Armée*;

'The triplane Fokker is disappearing little by little. The Fokker D VII (biplane) is reported by our pursuit pilots to be encountered frequently. It is an excellent machine, better than the 180 horsepower SPAD, equal to the 220 horsepower SPAD in horizontal speed, and is apparently able to climb faster, is extremely manoeuvrable and able to continue acrobacy at high altitudes of 5000 to 5500 metres.'

By that point the Americans had already learned most of that information the hard way.



**Mechanics work on 'Snake' O'Neill's Nieuport N6145 'Black 10'. The cowling at lower left reveals the personal 'sharksmouth' that O'Neill applied to his aeroplane (*Dr James Parks via Greg VanWyngarden*)**



2Lt Kenneth Lee Porter with his Nieuport N6256 'Black 15', which has the white cowling and wheel hubs (the latter not visible in this photograph) of 'C' Flight. Porter shared his first two victories with several other 147th pilots on 2 July 1918 (*Alan Roesler*)

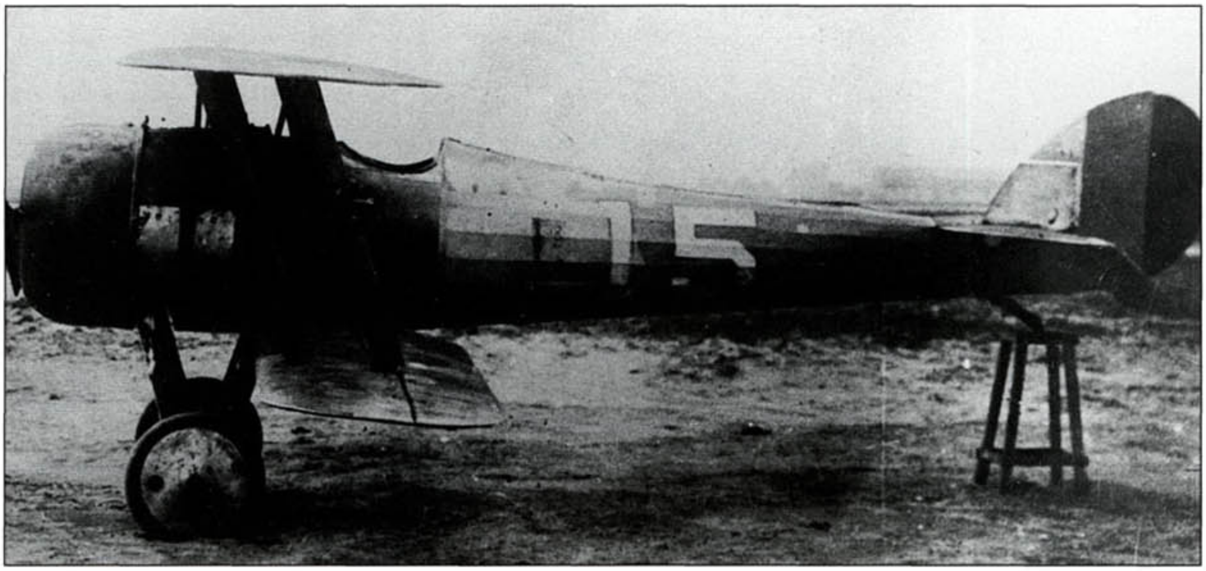
Inclement weather gave the 1st Pursuit's men a welcome excuse to take the day off and celebrate the Fourth of July, but the 147th made up for it the next morning when O'Neill downed a Pfalz near Château Thierry and shared another with 1Lt Francis M Simonds, while 1Lt Joseph C Raible Jnr claimed a third.

The 95th had two combats that day which broke in new pilot 1Lt Quentin Roosevelt. The youngest son of former President Theodore Roosevelt, the 20-year-old 'Quent' had been keen to shine on his own merits, but soon after his arrival on 17 June he was put in command of 'C' Flight when a landing accident on the 25th left Bill Taylor recuperating in hospital for more than a month. Roosevelt declined the honour, but when it was ordered upon him, he deferred actual leadership duties to Harold Buckley until he could gain more experience of his own.

During the second dogfight on 5 July Roosevelt suffered a gun jam, but he at least allayed his concerns about getting 'cold feet' in combat. 'You get so excited that you forget everything except getting the other fellow', he wrote, 'and trying to dodge the tracers when they start streaking past you'. Still, the 95th came off second best in this clash with *Jasta* 'Boelcke' – 1Lts John Mitchell and Waldo H Heinrichs were credited with a Fokker, but 1Lt Sidney J Thompson was killed by Ltn Hermann Frommherz and 1Lt Carlyle Rhodes forced down by Ltn Karl Bolle and captured.

Although a new 94th pilot, 1Lt Hamilton Coolidge was credited with a Rumpler near Bennes at 0950 hrs on 7 July. Later that morning, the squadron lost 1Lt William W Chalmers, who was brought down wounded and taken prisoner – one of three Nieuports credited to Ltn Franz Brandt, Vzfw Erich Buder and Vzfw Otto Frühner of *Jasta* 26. Five Nieuports of the 95th took on five Fokkers near Rocourt that same day, and 1Lt McKeown was shot down and taken prisoner. Nieuports were credited to Vzfw Josef Schwendemann and Otto Rosenfeld of *Jasta* 41, but Rosenfeld was in turn killed near Coincy – the tangible loss of a

Porter with his Nieuport, showing the large, bold rendition of 'C-15' on his upper wing. Barely visible is the rat terrier squadron insignia, which was rendered smaller and higher on the fuselage than was normally the case (*Col C R Glasebrook Collection via Jon Guttman*)



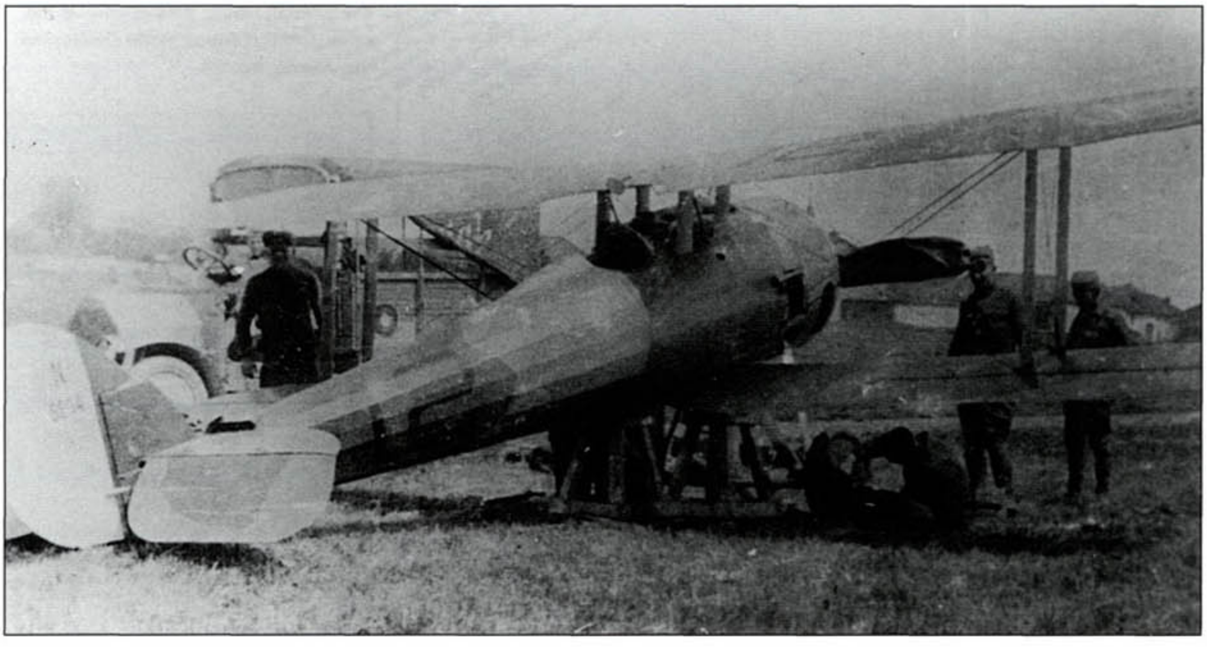
Bill Loomis' Nieuport N6181 of the 94th was flown by 1Lt William W Chalmers as 'White 15' on 7 July 1918, when he was brought down by *Jasta* 26 – three of whose pilots claimed Nieuports in the action, although Chalmers was the only loss (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

Just delivered to the 147th Aero Squadron, Nieuport N6264 displays the number 'Black 12' on its fuselage sides and wings, and groundcrewmen seem to be applying blue paint to the wheel hub. It was being flown by 2Lt M O Parry when he was killed, probably by Ltn Fritz Friedrichs of *Jasta* 10, on 8 July (*T J Abernethy via J Guttman*)

13-victory German ace that went curiously unnoticed by the Allies, who did not confirm Sumner Sewall's claim of a Fokker destroyed in the fight.

On 8 July the 27th became the first squadron to move from Touquin to Saints aerodrome in order to be closer to the front. 1Lts Rickenbacker, Green and Loomis claimed a two-seater near Château Thierry that day, although it was not confirmed. Seven Nieuports of the 147th also attacked ten enemy fighters and chased them 20 kilometres into German lines, but during the return flight Maxwell Parry lost his formation and was fatally ambushed near Dormans by Ltn Friedrichs of *Jasta* 10.

Forty-eight hours later the 95th was pleased to credit Roosevelt with driving a Fokker down out of control. He had lost his patrol that day and latched onto three fighters he saw until he drew closer and spotted the black crosses on their tails. 'I had altitude on them', he wrote, 'and what was more they hadn't seen me, so I pulled up, put my sights on the end man, and let go. I saw my tracers going all around him, but for some



Appointed to command a flight in the 95th over his own objections, 1Lt Quentin Roosevelt, shown here training at Issoudun, was credited with a victory on 10 July (*Jon Guttman*)

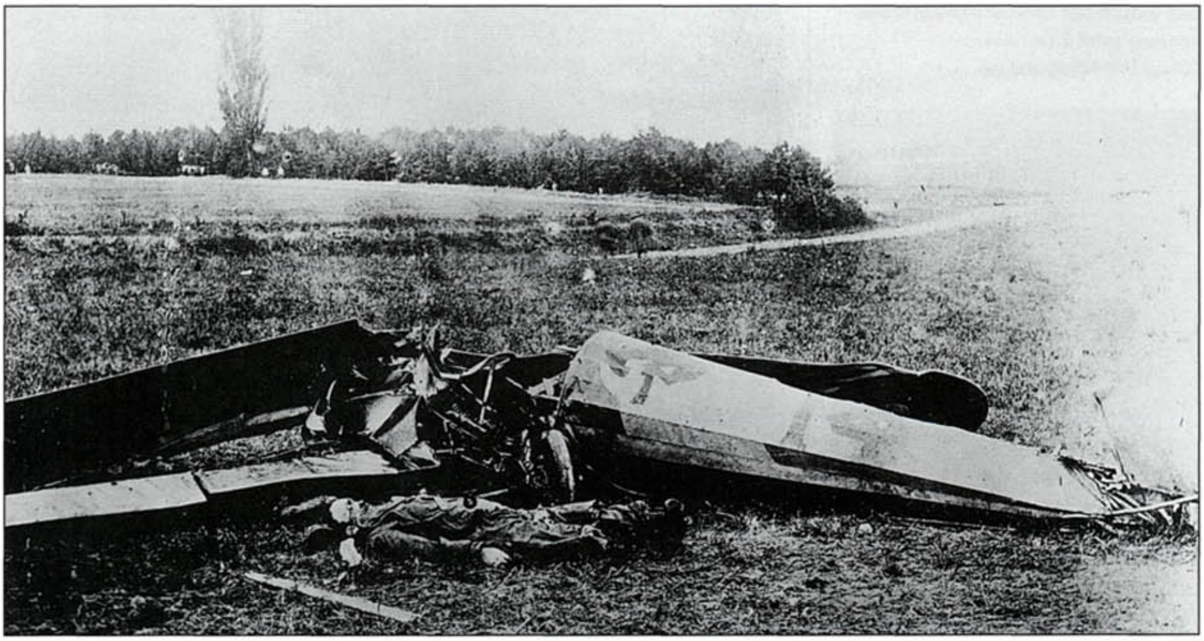
reason he never even turned, until all of a sudden his tail came up and he went down in a vrille. I wanted to follow him, but the other two had started around me, so I had to cut and run'.

Although he certainly did not lack for courage, Roosevelt's eyes suffered from poor depth perception, so none too surprisingly his success had no corresponding loss on the other side.

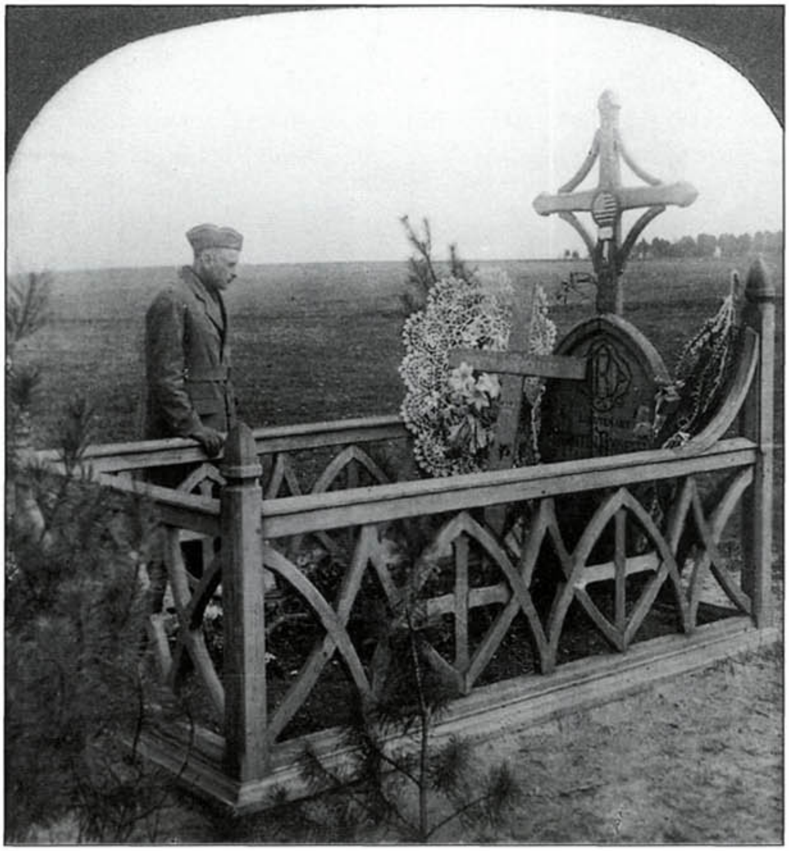
Rickenbacker was also patrolling on 10 July when he began to suffer intense pain in his right ear. It proved to be an abscess that had to be lanced, putting the 94th ace out of commission for the rest of the month.

Bastille Day was a time for limited celebration in 1918, as French troops along the Marne prepared for the final German push that their commanders already knew was coming. Aerial activity was generally subdued, but there would be naught but mourning at the 95th Aero Squadron that 14 July, because Roosevelt failed to return from a patrol. Bill Buford wrote an eyewitness account in a letter home;

The remains of Quentin Roosevelt by his Nieuport N6177 on 14 July. The taking and circulating of this photograph earned the German high command much criticism, and its propaganda value backfired as many German soldiers were impressed that the son of a former American president would put his life on the line for his country as Roosevelt had done (*Greg VanWyngarden*)



**Roosevelt was buried with military honours by the Germans, but the Americans subsequently improved his resting place, which was visited by thousands of Allied service men thereafter (*Jon Guttman*)**



'Four of us were out on an early patrol, and we had just crossed the lines looking for Boche observation machines when we ran into seven Fokker Chasse aeroplanes. They had the altitude and the advantage of the sun on us. It was very cloudy and there was a strong wind blowing us farther across the lines all the time. The leader of our formation turned and tried to back out, but they attacked before we reached the lines. In a few seconds they had broken up our formation and the fight developed in a general free-for-all. I tried to keep an eye on all of our fellows but we were hopelessly separated and outnumbered nearly two to one.

'About half-a-mile away I saw one of our aeroplanes with three Boche on him, and as he seemed to be having a pretty hard time with them, I shook the two I was manoeuvring with and tried to get over to him. Before I could reach them, however, his machine turned over on its back and plunged down out of control. I realised it was too late to be of any assistance.'

The Germans later reported that Roosevelt had been shot down over Chamery by Uffz Carl Emil Gräper of *Jasta* 50, and published a photograph of his body beside his Nieuport, N6177. They had subsequently buried Roosevelt with full military honours, and his grave became a shrine to Allied troops in the months to follow.

**Joining the 94th Aero Squadron on 16 June, 1Lt Hamilton Coolidge was credited with his first victory on 7 July. He swore to avenge the death of his good friend Quent Roosevelt, but would not officially resume his scoring until 2 October (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

## TURNING POINT

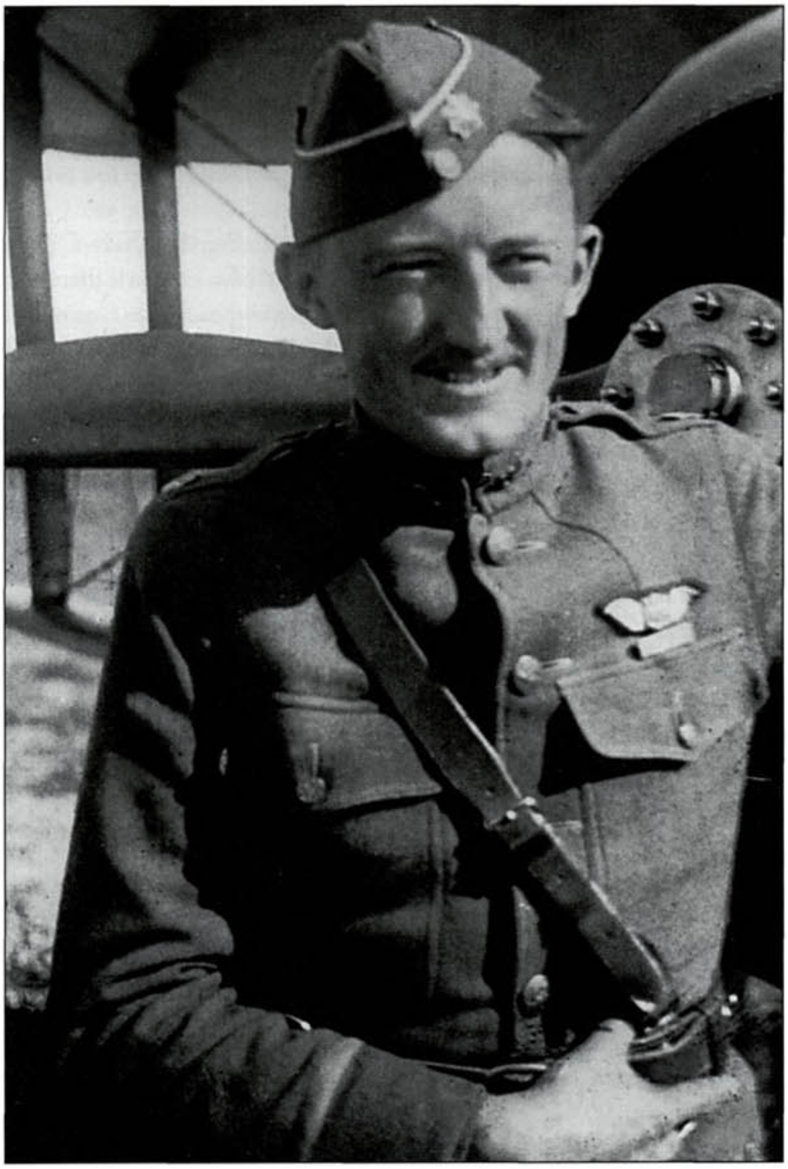
Early on the morning of 15 July the Germans launched their last all-out attempt at a breakthrough, only to be stopped in their tracks by the French and Americans. Much of the 27th Aero Squadron was under quarantine for scabies, but everyone in the squadron who could fly did, including

Maj Hartney, reconnoitring in one of two unarmed Sopwith Camels that had been assigned to his unit.

'2Lt John K MacArthur, particularly, appointed himself a committee of one to stop the whole German Army by strafing the troops crossing the pontoon bridges at Dormans and elsewhere on the Marne', Hartney later recalled. 'He flew a total of seven-and-a-half hours, emptying all his ammunition on the ground troops and hurrying back for more'. MacArthur also claimed an enemy scout near Château Thierry that was not confirmed.

Ten Nieuports of the 147th had an encounter with JG III that same morning, during which Abernethy and Robertson claimed two 'probables' before being cut off by five Fokkers.

'As I remember it', Thomas Abernethy wrote in 1981, 'we were making our first turn to go back over the route, and the turn was to the left, *into* Germany. I was a *lousy* flyer and was particularly troubled by left hand turns, as the gas and air manets on the left side got in the way of my knee (I was 6 feet 3 inches tall in those days). So my poor turn brought me well



**Maj Hartney stands before the unarmed Sopwith Camel in which he reconnoitred the battlefield on 15 July 1918 (*Michael Hamaty via Charles Woolley*)**

Brought down by Ltn Hermann Frommherz of *Jasta* 'Boelcke' on 15 July – and pleased to have survived the experience – 2Lt George A S Robertson of the 147th Aero Squadron poses beside his dismantled Nieuport N6232 'Black 5' before it is transported back to Saints for repairs (*Thomas J Abernethy via Jon Guttman*)

Brought down in Allied lines on 15 July by Ltn Harry von Bülow of *Jasta* 36, 2Lt Thomas J Abernethy also grins gratefully beside Robertson's Nieuport (*Thomas J Abernethy via Jon Guttman*)

to the north of Dormans and well into Hun territory, where the fun began. I heard a rat-tat-tat behind me and found a Fokker D VII on my tail. He went on by and headed home and I went after him, and have always claimed that I got him. I watched him almost into the ground, and then, satisfied and smug because I had just shot down my first aeroplane, I turned back toward home, but looking up found five more fighters sitting on top of me!

'I knew it was no sense to try to run away. The D VII was faster than I was, but we felt the Nieuport was the most manoeuvrable fighter in the air (equalled only, perhaps, by the Camel), so I elected to stay in and mix it up. I shot at anything that came across my sights, fell into a couple of spins and righted myself promptly. I also had several jammed guns, at which point I turned and headed for home, hammering on the bolt with my little lead hammer till she went home, then turning back into the fight. Once I came head on toward one of them, and by then I had lost my head enough to think that I would ram him and get one before I went. Fortunately, he had more sense than I did, and we passed by each other wingtip-to-wingtip.

'Shortly afterward I noticed that my engine was dead. Then, the only thing to do was go into the flattest glide that I dared, for the Marne was still a long way ahead. Two of them stayed with me. One slowed down behind me and emptied his guns, before banking away and letting the other fall into his place. I could literally see the second fighter slow down to a proper distance and open up his guns.

'I eased across the Marne and into a big field on the south side. One of them circled low over me, and I had the presence of mind to sit there and let him think he had me for sure, and he then swung back into Germany.'

Finding himself near Courboin, Abernethy encountered a colonel of the 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Division, and when he said 'According to my map this is German territory', the officer replied, 'They did have it earlier this afternoon, but we have it now'. One of two engine magnetos and a cylinder had been shot through, as well as sections of fabric, but word of a possible impending gas attack led Abernethy to try taking off again – only to roll into a shell hole and end up on his back!

Abernethy's squadronmate 2Lt George Robertson, although pursued even farther into Allied lines until some SPADs finally drove off his antagonists, also survived his forced landing, and his Nieuport was subsequently recovered. Abernethy's Fokker claim was not confirmed – although he later marked it alongside the three confirmed 'dead rats' beneath the paws of his terrier insignia – but he was awarded the DSC for his actions that day. He was apparently the fifth victory for Ltn Harry von Bülow of *Jasta* 36, while Robertson was credited to Ltn Frommherz of *Jasta* 'Boelcke'.

On 16 July the Germans broke through, and the 27th Aero Squadron received reports that enemy troops had advanced as far as Epernay, south and west of Château Thierry. Hartney ordered 13 of his aeroplanes up to confirm those reports, and between 1330 and 1530 hrs they had four dogfights. During one of these clashes 1Lt Malcolm R Gunn was shot down by Uffz Schneck of *Jasta* 9. 'The spot where he fell was pulverised by artillery', Hartney wrote, 'and, although I exhausted every effort after the Armistice, no trace of him or his aeroplane was ever found.'

Mechanics Cosgriff and Earl Stratton, 1Lt Jerry Vasconcells and Sgt Saxe pose before Vasconcells' Nieuport at Epiez in late June 1918. Vasconcells shot down a Rumpler for his first victory on 16 July 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

At 1810 hrs, 1Lt Jerry C Vasconcells, a Coloradan of Portuguese descent who was destined to be one of the 27th's most professional flight leaders, evened the score when he destroyed a Rumpler west of Dormans.

At 1830 hrs Norton led another patrol, during the return leg of which 1Lt Zenos R Miller burned a balloon south of Coupoil and 2Lt Clapp downed a Rumpler near Vourbin. The flight reported being fired on from the ground with incendiary rounds tied together – called 'flaming onions' by the Allies – and before the patrol was done 1Lts Schmidt and Hoover force-landed at Rebais, apparently credited to Vzfw Günther Dobberke and Vzfw Paul Völker of *Jasta* 60, although neither American was injured.

Hartney was attacked by two Fokkers over Epernay but managed to outmanoeuvre them until they dived for home. 'More or less frantic with the excitement', Hartney wrote, 'I followed after the Fokkers for five miles or more', before he remembered that his Camel was unarmed. His rash act was witnessed by Robert Raymond, who had been brought down just within German lines by JG III's *Geschwaderführer*, Oblt Bruno Loerzer. 'As they grabbed him, he looked up and saw a lone Camel, which he recognised', wrote Hartney. 'It was his totally harmless CO, blissfully sailing over at about 1500 ft, with the sky flecked with enemy ships'.

The 147th was also active on the 16th, starting with an 11-aeroplane patrol between 1318 and 1500 hrs, during which Pip Porter dived on two Fokkers over Forêt de Ris and drove one down, reporting it to have struck the ground 'flush on his nose'. That confirmed success may have been over Vzfw Gustav Nolte of *Jasta* 36, killed near Trelou-sur-Marne.

Meanwhile, at 1415 hrs, 1Lts Arthur H Jones, Daniel W Cassard and Frank Simonds engaged nine enemy aeroplanes over Dormans, Jones and Simonds both claiming Fokkers and the former – the only one in the flight to file a reconnaissance report upon his return – subsequently being awarded the DSC. Cassard, however, was killed, possibly by Ltn Walter Blume of *Jasta* 9, and 1Lts George J Brew and Bennett Wells washed out their Nieuports in forced landings in Allied lines.

During an eight-aeroplane patrol that evening, O'Neill attacked a two-seater south of Neully and last saw it going down in a vertical dive from an altitude of 1500 metres, although its destruction was not confirmed. The 95th fared somewhat better, as 1Lt Grover C Vann was credited with a Fokker and Curtis and Sewall with a two-seater near Château Thierry.

John MacArthur's claim of a Rumpler destroyed on 17 July was not confirmed, but squadronmate 2Lt Ivan A Roberts was credited with one north of Dormans. His victim may have been from Fl Abt (A) 264s, which lost an aeroplane at La Fosse Ferme, with the pilot, Vzfw Heinrich, injured and the observer, Ltn d R Heinrich Bube, dead.

The 18th saw the Germans abandon their last bid to win the war, and some French and American units, keen to keep the enemy off-balance, promptly launched counterattacks that by the 20th had become the first of a succession of Allied offensives that would ultimately compel Germany to sue for peace. 18 July also saw the 95th's Ned Buford claim an Albatros two-seater that could not be confirmed, while two of ten patrolling Nieuports of the 27th crash-landed. Their pilots, Schmidt and 1Lt Jason S Hunt, emerged unhurt, however.

Ralph Schmidt presented his CO with a dilemma. He had faked his way through the eye tests to join the USAS, and although he had shared in two victories on 2 July, Hartney had witnessed several occasions when Germans slipped onto his tail unnoticed. On the 19th, Hartney called him into his office. 'Look here Schmitty, old topper, you're as blind as a bat', he declared. 'Somehow, I've got to send you back to the rear before you get killed'.

'Oh, please don't do that', Schmidt pleaded. 'No one will understand. I just haven't been quick enough on the trigger. They won't catch me again. Please let me go on a few more days and then if I come back with any more bullet holes near my head, I'll ask to be sent back. You won't have to order it.'

'What could I do with a spirit like that?' Hartney wrote. He allowed Schmidt to take part in a ten-aeroplane patrol that engaged seven Fokkers and two-seaters over Château Thierry on the 19th. Two of the latter were credited to 1Lts Leo H Dawson and Robert E Hill, but as Hartney described it, 'A Boche gunner planted a nice clean bullet hole in the seat of Schmitty's pants'. During another fight with Fokkers on the return leg of the patrol, MacArthur was credited with a Fokker for his fifth victory, while Dawson and 'Red' Miller claimed two 'probables'.

After a short time in Advance Hospital No 7 at Oulchy-le-Ville, Schmidt was sent home to Cleveland, Ohio, his potentially fatal effort to uphold his honour having ended better than it would for many of his more physically suitable squadronmates. Also slightly wounded was 1Lt Lawrence Richards of the 95th, who may have been the 'SPAD' credited to Ltn Werner Seitz of *Jasta* 8 near Château Thierry at 1515 hrs that day.

The 27th Aero Squadron, which had already seen its share of bad days, had another on 20 July, as Dawson, Roberts and MacArthur claimed unconfirmed victories before two of their squadronmates were shot down by Ltn Rudolf Klimke and Vzfw Wilhelm Neuenhofen of – by ironic coincidence – *Jasta* 27. Zenos Miller became a PoW and John MacArthur died of his wounds. Fred Norton was also severely wounded, but managed to reach Allied lines and was rushed to a French hospital.

Meanwhile, six Nieuports of the 147th were escorting a Salmson of the 1st Aero Squadron home when engine trouble forced the observation aeroplane down in Allied lines. Landing nearby, 2Lt John Stevens took the observer's photographs and written notes and flew them over to headquarters. Stevens' initiative in getting the Salmson's intelligence into the right hands without delay allowed an American regiment to carry out its advance, and earned him a letter of commendation from Brig Gen William Mitchell. Maj Atkinson also got a commendation from the French VI *Armée* 'for the very excellent performance of the 1st Pursuit Group during the last attack'.

Meanwhile, from 13 July onwards, the 1st Pursuit Group had begun to receive SPAD XIIIs – a change that did not meet with total approval. The 94th and 95th Aero Squadrons welcomed theirs, but as Hartney noted in his book *Up and At 'Em*, 'Both the 27th and the 147th were heartbroken'. Because Hartney and Bonnell had had previous rotary engine experience with the RFC, they knew what the Nieuports could and could not do, and had shared that knowledge with their men. In consequence, Hartney claimed, 'no Nieuport of ours ever stripped its wings'.

Bonnell protested so bitterly about the Nieuports' withdrawal that he was relieved of his command and transferred to the gunnery school at St Jean de Mont on 22 July. Acting command of the 147th was temporarily assumed by the 95th's 1Lt Hambleton. On the 24th, 2Lt Wilbert W White, a 29-year-old New Yorker in the 147th who had a wife and two children when he 'decided it is the thing to do' to enlist in the USAS, wrote in his flight log, '1400-1420 hrs. Trial trip in SPAD #9589. Give me my Nieuport!'

Although the Nieuport 28's overall performance had proven inferior to the Fokker D VII's, the US Army placed an order for an additional 600 examples, with all their earlier mechanical problems remedied and Marlin machine guns substituted for the Vickers. None of these improved aircraft had reached the front before the Armistice.

During an offensive patrol on 22 July, 1Lt William W Palmer of the 94th was slightly wounded near Clinchy-le-Château. He may have been one of two 'SPADs' credited to Ltn Richard Wenzl and Vzfw Franz Hemer of *Jasta* 6, while an unconfirmed Fokker claimed by Palmer's squadronmate Reed Chambers might have been Ltn Werner Nöldecke, who was also lightly wounded.

**2Lts Wilbert W White and Kenneth L Porter with Capt James Meissner (right), who replaced Maj Geoffrey Bonnell as commander of the 147th Aero Squadron on 22 July. Nieuport N6235 in the background was flown by 2Lt John Stevens when he was killed on 31 July (*Alan Roesler*)**

Abe Abernethy
147th Sqdn
1st Pursuit Group

**Abe Abernethy of the 147th shared in two victories flying N6199 on 24 July, but 'washed out' the aeroplane on 30 July (*Thomas J Abernethy via Jon Guttman*)**

The next day the 27th was saddened to learn that Fred Norton had succumbed to the wounds he had sustained 72 hours earlier. Before he died, the former All-American collegiate football star scribbled the message, 'Twenty-seventh – more power to you'. On 7 August Norton's last words were officially adopted as the squadron's motto. Norton Field in Columbus, Ohio, was subsequently named in his honour.

Confusing doings marked the 147th's activities on the 24th. First, a 13-aeroplane morning escort for a Salmson of the 1st Aero Squadron encountered 12 Fokkers about 3500 metres over the Bois de Fére. In the ensuing fight a Fokker was credited to Pip Porter, Jones and 1Lt James A Healy, and another to Porter, Jones, Simonds, O'Neill and Abernethy. Porter shared in the victories in spite of the fact that his guns jammed after firing 30 rounds and he did not personally claim anything. Later that afternoon Healy claimed the destruction of yet another Fokker, and he shared a third with 1Lt Raible. Healy was duly awarded the *Croix de Guerre* for his efforts on 24 July, even though neither victory was credited.

Meanwhile, Wilbert White – back in his Nieuport 28, but separated from the flight he was leading due to a fitful engine – flew over a cloud and found two Albatros D Vas just 100 metres below him and 200 metres to the east. Closing to 50 metres, he fired on one and reported, 'I saw the pilot look around, throw one hand to his head and fall forward'. While it spun down he chased the other Albatros through the clouds until he reported seeing it 'crash into the ground head on' near Château Thierry. For his first two victories, as well as the courage he had displayed in an unsuccessful attack on a balloon on 19 July, White was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* with Palm by the French.

In contrast to the 147th's successes, a 16-aeroplane patrol from the 27th reported no combats, but 1Lt Richard C Martin and 2Lt Clapp force-landed, Martin's plane being written off as a result.

A curious postscript to the 147th's activities occurred on 25 July, after an 11-aeroplane patrol led by White re-encountered five Pfalz menacing an Allied two-seater. Jones dove on one attacker and drove it off, but the only other noteworthy incident was White landing at the 12th Aero Squadron's aerodrome for engine repairs, while new arrival 2Lt Walter P Muther landed three kilometres north of Château Thierry to have his damaged propeller replaced, only to crash upon his return to Saints! James Healy and 'Doc' Raible did not fly that day, yet General Orders 20.282 credited them with shares in an 'aircraft'. A logical possibility is that it was a belated, and misdated, confirmation of their claims of the previous day.

## SPADS ENTER THE FRAY

The badly bloodied 27th Aero Squadron welcomed some replacement pilots on the 25th in the form of 1Lts Harry H Harkins, Ernest W Hewitt, Edwin R Kingsland, Ruliff V Nevius, Joseph H Wehner and Arthur L Whiton, and 2Lt Frank Luke Jnr, as well as Donald W Donaldson, transferred in from the 95th. At the 147th, 1Lt Jimmy Meissner arrived to assume permanent squadron command from Hambleton. Having survived two incidents in which his Nieuport 28 had shed its wing fabric while he was in the 94th, Meissner had no objection to seeing the unit re-equipped with SPADs.

The new French fighter could not have had a better endorsement that same day when the 95th engaged Fokker D VIIs of Royal Saxon *Jasta* 72 north of Château Thierry. The first claim in the new type was by 1Lt Jim Knowles. As he was pursuing one enemy fighter, however, out of the corner of his eye he noticed a fireball flash less than ten feet from his SPAD. It was Grover Vann, killed just three short weeks after he had joined the unit.

'Just those few seconds, as I watched that aeroplane come down, added about 30 years to my life', Knowles said. 'With a rare presence of mind, which consisted of keeping my guns wide open all the time in the dogfight that followed Vann's death, I got my first official one. One unlucky Jerry just happened to wander in front of me and got the full benefit'.

Knowles' victim seems to have survived on his side of the lines, but not so the German claimed by 1Lt Walter L Avery, whose only prior experience had been night patrols and ground strafing missions in Nieuport 27s with N471. The latter unit was a French *escadrille* almost entirely made up of temporarily attached USAS personnel based at Le Bourget aerodrome for the defence of Paris. Avery described the combat in a letter home;

'Left with the 1745 hrs patrol. After flying along the lines north of Château Thierry for about an hour at 1500 metres, our formation of eight met about an equal number of Fokker biplanes, type D VII. Both formations broke and a general fight started. I dove on one Boche and another dove on me. I turned and got under the tail of the second Boche and shot. Both guns jammed. While clearing the jams he got on my tail and put two bullets in my left wing, one in my tail and a fourth bullet that cut my water pipe and nicked the frame of my windshield.

'I lost altitude while clearing the jams and he got directly above me, and behind. I did a retournement, and with the resulting speed was able to stand vertically on my tail and give him a good burst. He started to lose altitude and went down in a tight spiral. I followed him, shooting, and saw him crash in a wood northeast of "Château T". I then flew south of the Marne and landed in the edge of Château Thierry, as all the rest of both patrols had disappeared.'

Driving out to the crash site, Avery discovered that his lucky shot had destroyed his opponent's intake manifold. Unhurt, save for some cuts and bruises from his forced landing, the prisoner turned out to be Ltn Karl Menckhoff, commander of *Jasta* 72s and a holder of the *Orden Pour le Mérite* with 39 victories to his credit, who was visibly chagrined upon learning that his fighting career had been terminated by an American in his first aerial combat. He might have been equally disappointed to know that his countrymen never acknowledged his 40th victory. 'The German pilot claimed to have shot down an American before I got him', Avery noted, confirming that Menckhoff's victim had indeed been Vann.

**1Lt James Knowles' aerial victory on 25 July 1918 was also the 1st Pursuit Group's first with the new SPAD XIII (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

**No German record exists of a loss to match Knowles' victory, but there could be no doubt about the Fokker D VII claimed by 1Lt Walter L Avery in the same combat on 25 July (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

Avery, who was awarded the DSC for his feat, let Menckhoff keep his 'Blue Max' medal – which a French soldier subsequently took – but cut a section of fabric from the side of his wrecked Fokker D VII, bearing the pilot's initial (a large white 'M') as a souvenir. Held prisoner by the French, in August 1919 Menckhoff escaped to Switzerland, where he became a businessman and remained until his death in 1948.

***Orden Pour le Mérite*** **recipient Ltn Karl Menckhoff, CO of *Jasta* 72s, was more than a little miffed to learn that he had been brought down by an American engaging in his first aerial combat (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

The 95th's landmark day was not quite over, for later Knowles teamed up with former Harvard classmate Sumner Sewall, along with 1Lts Heinrichs, Clarence Gill and George W Puryear, to dash through an escort of six German fighters and shoot down a Rumpler near Villeneve-sur-Fére. 'Puryear thought that the Boche had came down in French territory, and he landed beside it', Avery wrote the next day, 'which was sure a bum "*faux pas*", as the territory must have been in Boche hands, for Puryear has not been heard from yet. When the Boche aeroplane landed, the observer was apparently dead, but the pilot jumped out of the cockpit and ran'.

'Heinrichs, having popped the observer, thought he had a first mortgage on the pilot and dropped down to give him a few rounds', added Knowles, who got the French *Croix de Guerre* for his part in the action. 'The pilot didn't last nearly as long on the ground as he had in the air, but we discovered later on that he was playing possum and had not been hit'. The 95th's victims may have been Ltn d R Ziegler and von Plessen of Fl Abt (A) 205b, who came down in their lines, both lightly wounded. After a few failed attempts George Puryear finally escaped his captors in October and returned to the 95th just before the Armistice.

## END OF A BLOODY MONTH

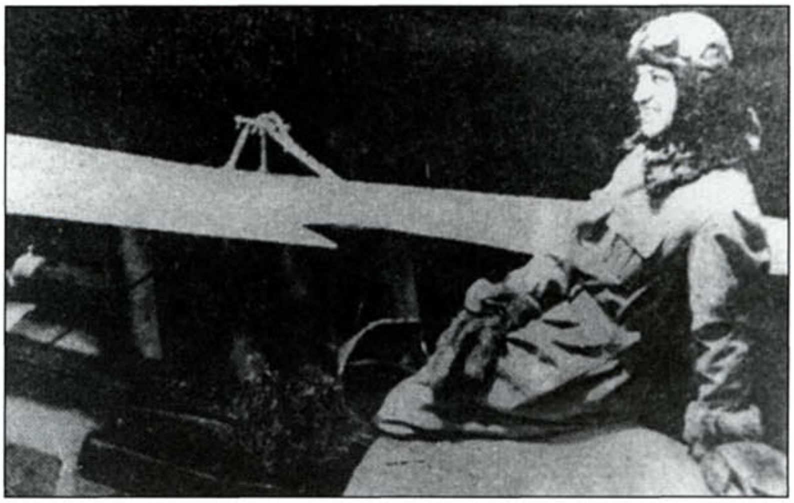
July ended for the 1st Pursuit Group as it had began – on a sour note. On 30 July, 1Lt Alexander B Bruce was shot down north of Grand Rozoy almost certainly by Ltn Heinz Drekmann of *Jasta* 4, although he returned to the 94th the next day. Rickenbacker, who had just rejoined the 94th after his ear operation, was slated to lead a patrol on the 31st, but a painful recurrence of his infection resulted in Alan Winslow heading up the 16 SPADs in his place. As the fighters neared Oulchy-le-Château, Winslow spotted 18 Fokkers and led his men down in a wedge-shaped formation as the Germans formed a defensive circle. Winslow noticed a lone Fokker above the others, dived, pulled up and fired at its underside.

'My aim was inaccurate', he later wrote, 'for he veered off and tried to get on my tail. His first burst also went wide'. As the two antagonists circled each other for advantage, another Fokker climbed up – at a rate that Winslow admitted he had fatally underestimated – and fired from below, holing his left wing and shattering his left arm. Winslow dove, trying to make for Allied lines, but fell short, pancaking between the second and third German trench lines at 2015 hrs. His demise was probably credited to Ltn Bolle of *Jasta* 'Boelcke', which lost no aeroplanes in spite of 1Lt Robert Z Cates being credited with a Fokker in the fight.

Winslow was criminally mistreated by his German doctor, whose bitterness at the United States' involvement in the war seemed to get the better of the Hippocratic Oath. Winslow knew his mangled left arm needed to be amputated, but the doctor refused. He spent almost a month steadily weakening, his pain dulled only by morphine, until the doctor was transferred and his replacement finally amputated Winslow's arm.

Imprisoned in Königsberg when the war ended, Winslow subsequently married and had three children, but tragedy continued to stalk him. A skiing accident in 1926 left him with a permanent limp, and on 26 February 1932, his wife died of pneumonia. Winslow was working for Pan American Airways' foreign department when he fell from a third-storey window in Ottawa, Canada, on 12 August 1933 after having reportedly 'suffered an attack of vertigo'. He died three days later.

In addition to Winslow, 2Lt John Stevens went missing from a returning 147th Aero Squadron patrol at 1640 hrs on the 31st. His grave was later found between Château Thierry and Dormans, Stevens having evidently been the victim of Ltn Emil Rolff of *Jasta* 6, who was credited with a Nieuport 28 near Fère-en-Tardenois at 1640 hrs that afternoon.



**2Lt John H Stevens of the 147th Aero Squadron poses with an early Nieuport 28 boasting an overwing Lewis machine gun mount that was subsequently removed. Stevens was killed in action on 31 July (*Thomas J Abernethy via Jon Guttman*)**

Still another loss was 1Lt Paul N Montague of the 95th, who was brought down by Ltn Johannes Klein of *Jasta* 15 and captured near Château Thierry at 2010 hrs.

1Lt Lansing C Holden Jnr, a 21-year-old architecture student from Brooklyn, New York, who had served alongside Avery in N471 from April to mid-July before joining the 95th, had had his first combat on the 25th, when Avery downed Menckhoff. Although he had suffered a double gun jam and was fortunate to outdive the four Fokkers that pursued him, the exhilarated Holden wrote home, 'What a game it is – nothing can touch it for sport!' A week later, however, his diary revealed a different attitude;

'God knows how many of us will get back alive. Our squadron alone had lost three in the week I have been here. The 95th has lost more men than any squadron in the US service. We have lost 11 killed or prisoners, not counting those severely wounded and out of it for good. I don't want to exaggerate, but I am certain that our group is catching, and will catch for sometime to come, more hell than I ever dreamed of. These new Fokker biplanes driven by Germany's best pilots come in bunches of 30 or 40 to our measly 15.'

## THE WORST DAY

Bleak as the overall picture for July had been, 1 August overshadowed it when the 1st Pursuit Group suffered its worst day for losses during the entire war. This time the squadron that caught the most hell was the 27th.

At 0705 hrs, the unit sent out a mixed patrol of 12 SPADs and six Nieuports from its airfield at Saints as escorts for Salmson 2A2s sent to photograph enemy positions near Fismes. Three successful circuits were flown, allowing observers to

**Transferring to the 95th with Walter Avery from French *escadrille* N471, 1Lt Lansing Colton Holden Jnr took part in the 25 July dogfight, but did not score his first victory until 29 September. He went on to claim seven aerial successes, including five balloons. Completing his studies at Princeton University after the war, Holden became an architect, a Hollywood stunt pilot and actor, and a member of the 102nd Observation Squadron, New York National Guard. On 13 November 1938, however, he fatally crashed into a hillside when flying in bad weather near Sparata, Tennessee (*The Museum of Flight, Seattle, Washington*)**

deliver and change film. However, on a fourth circuit, conducted by two Salmsons, the Americans were jumped by eight Fokkers east of Fère-en-Tardenois at 0810 hrs.

During the melée, 1Lt Hudson spun down with four Fokkers on his tail, saw one overshoot, fired at the target of opportunity and reported that 'he fell off slowly on his right wing and went into a spin'. Spinning down to shake off his other pursuers, Hudson stated that, 'A SPAD passed within 20 ft of my right wing, falling on its back'. Pulling up, he noticed the Fokkers climbing, but 'my engine was boiling and I could not climb as my Nourrice was empty, and by using the hand pump I could just keep going'. During the return flight, Hudson claimed to have attacked two Rumplers, one of which he saw lose its right wing before it crashed, and the other he saw hit the ground beside a railway embankment. Hudson was credited with all three aeroplanes, sharing the Fokker with 2Lt Roberts. Nevius was also credited with a Fokker.

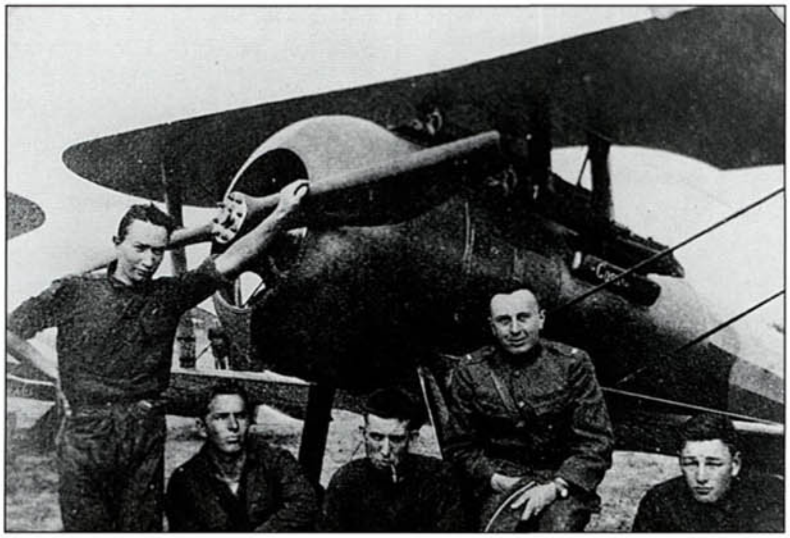
Jerry Vasconcells fired at a Fokker that was attacking a Salmson, then latched onto two more that were on the tail of 1Lt Oliver T Beauchamp's SPAD. 'One enemy aircraft turned sharply to the left and dived and the other continued firing', Vasconcells reported. 'I observed 1Lt Beauchamp turn over and go down on his back'. Vasconcells then fired at another Fokker on a SPAD's tail from a distance of 40 metres and last saw it spinning down. 'At the very beginning of the fight', he added, 'I observed the last Nieuport on the right of my formation go down in a spin. I do not know whether he was out of control, but apparently so. I later learned that Lt Sands was in this position'.

The 27th had once again had a run-in with von Richthofen's 'Circus', because Nieuports were credited to Ltns Udet, Johannes Jessen and Egon Koepsch of *Jasta* 4, as well as *Jasta* 6's Ltn Richard Wenzl, who reported his victim falling in flames, and Vzfw Franz Hemer. The only possible corresponding German casualties were *Jasta* 6's CO, Ltn Paul Wenzel, slightly wounded in the right arm, and Flgr Köhler and Ltn Holland, a two-seater crew from Fl Abt 29 that were wounded west of Soissons.

The Germans could misperceive their successes, too. One of their claimed victims, Hudson, returned unhurt to receive confirmation of his third through fifth victories. Another, SPAD pilot Beauchamp, also made it back to Saints, but fatally crashed upon landing. 1Lts Charles B Sands and Jason S Hunt were killed, while 1Lts Richard C Martin and Arthur L Whiton were taken prisoner.

Shot through the hand and shoulder, Martin tried to reach Allied lines, but dizziness from loss of blood forced him to land short of his goal and to spend the rest of the war in Karlsruhe. Whiton claimed a Fokker, and he was making for Allied lines when two more D VIIs attacked him and a bullet in the fuel tank stopped his engine. Deliberately crashing in the third German trench line, he was trying to burn the remains of his aircraft when infantry and artillery soldiers captured him. He spent time in several prisons before being liberated from Villengen on 27 November.

Another 27th pilot, 1Lt Clifford A McElvain, became separated from his flight. 'I had had enough for one day and I headed home', he said many years later. 'As I flew, I discovered too late that I was on a collision course with a flight of five Fokkers D VIIs, coming at them out of the sun, and they apparently did not see me'. Making the most of it, he fired at the lead



**1Lt Clifford McElvain of the 27th Aero Squadron (second from right) poses with his mechanics before his Nieuport 28 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

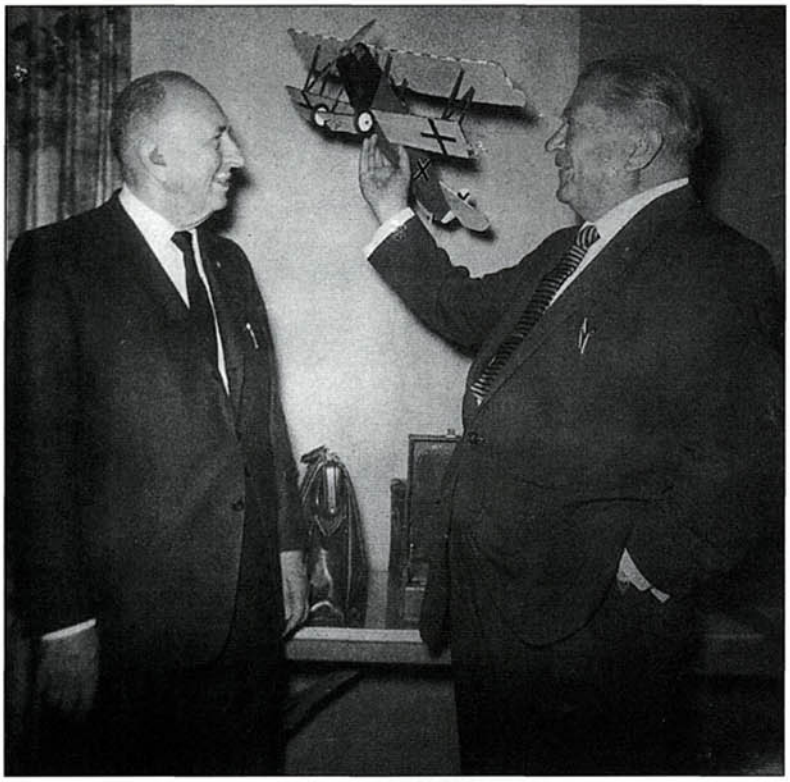
aeroplane, but did not learn until later that he had wounded Ltn d R Günther Schuster, a six-victory ace and commander of *Jasta* 17, who came down near Soissons. 'The three others simply got out of the way and circled,' McElvain continued, 'leaving one man to deal with me by himself.'

The German who dealt with McElvain was Ltn d R Alfred Fleischer, who after checking behind to ensure there were no other enemy aeroplanes about, said that he rushed to aid his *Staffelführer*, already in a smoking descent. 'I was very light in both fuel and ammunition', McElvain recalled, 'so my Nieuport was especially agile. Fleischer's Fokker D VII was faster and could out-climb me, but even so our aeroplanes were pretty well matched'.

Fleischer fired and McElvain went into a steep climb, which would have worked against most German fighters, but not the D VII, which climbed even faster. McElvain evaded Fleischer's next burst with a wingover to the left. The two opponents circled for some time, neither gaining an altitude advantage and neither able to get off more than a few poorly aimed shots at the other.

'At an altitude of approximately 1000-1500 ft, I successfully placed several well directed shots after having first completed a reverse ascending curve', Fleischer recalled. 'Soon thereafter, McElvain exposed himself in a

**Six-victory ace Lt d R Günther Schuster with the Fokker D VII he flew as commander of *Jasta* 17 before 1Lt McElvain wounded him on 1 August 1918 – a success confirmable only through Ltn Alfred Fleischer, the German who shot down McElvain minutes later (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



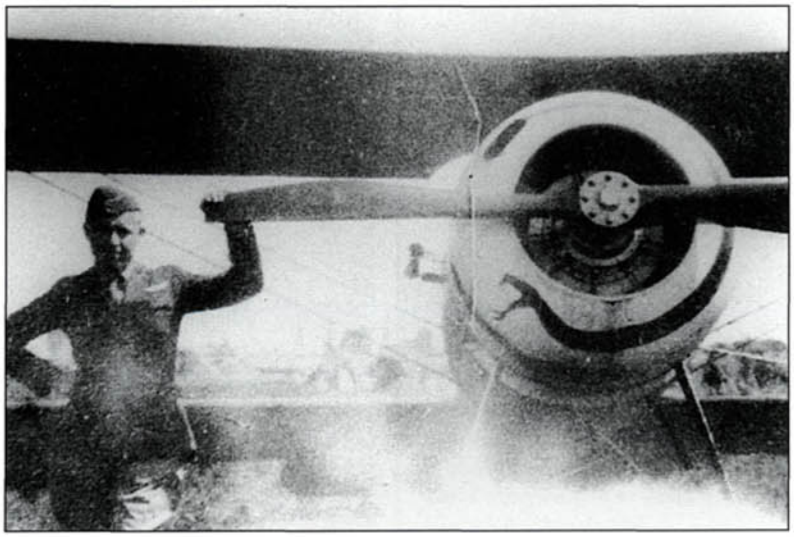
Former adversaries Clifford McElvain (left) and Alfred Fleischer relive their 1 August 1918 dogfight at a Midwest Chapter meeting of the *Cross & Cockade Society* in the early 1960s (*Greg Van Wyngarden*)

manner at first entirely incomprehensible to me. I was able to gain a position 120-150 ft behind him, and had already aimed my machine gun upon him, ready to pull the trigger in the fever of the chase. There I beheld, thank God, in the last moment that the propeller of my adversary stood still and that the aeroplane, totally out of control, prepared to land'.

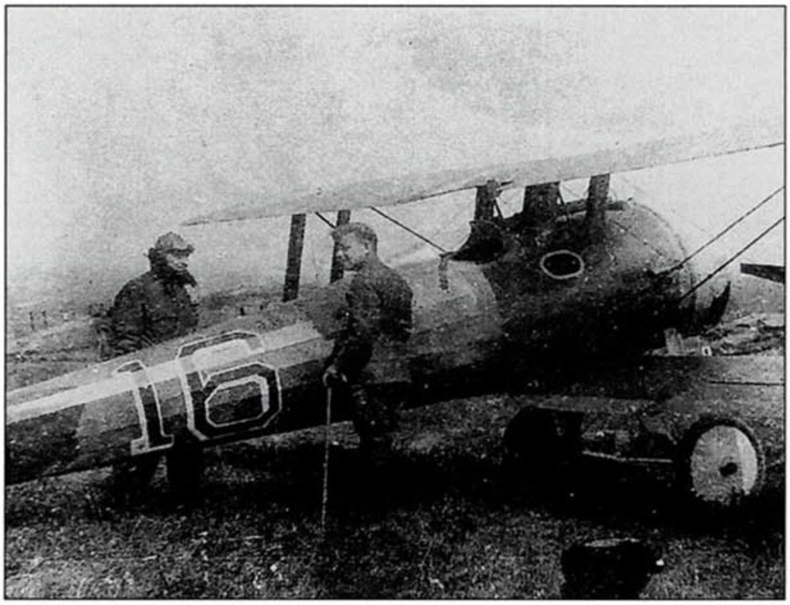
McElvain emerged unhurt from his crash and waved to the victor. Fleischer landed nearby and the two enemies shook hands, conversed for a time and exchanged addresses, before McElvain was led off to prison.

The on-and-off friendship borne of war resumed as they met again in the 1930s when McElvain was a real estate mortgage broker and a major commanding a National Guard squadron in Chicago, while Fleischer, who had survived the war with six victories, was chief of air police at Berlin's Tempelhof Airport. Both men rose in rank to colonel during World War 2, and after the conflict had ended, McElvain helped Fleischer and his family emerge from dire economic straits. In 1950 he helped them move to Chicago, although Alfred Fleischer returned to Germany in 1961 and eventually died there on 11 June 1978 – his son became an American citizen, however. Clifford McElvain passed away in 1968.

The 1 August debacle ended the Nieuport 28's combat career on a low note, although Meissner and



2Lt William E Brotherton poses with his Nieuport N6334 'Black 16', whose white cowling he decorated with a black snake. 'Bedroll' Brotherton, together with Capt James Meissner, scored the last Nieuport 28 victory on 1 August 1918 (*Jon Guttman*)



**A side view of Brotherton's Nieuport N6334, seen in the process of being marked. Details and exact colours of the elliptical marking below the cabane struts remains a mystery (*Jon Guttman*)**

Brotherton of the 147th claimed a Fokker over Fère-en-Tardenois at 1330 hrs that day – the last such victory credited to the type. Ironically, the only German-acknowledged casualty inflicted by a Nieuport pilot on 1 August was Cliff McElvain's wounding of Schuster, and with only Fleischer's postwar testimony to confirm it, that victory was never credited to him!

The SPADs had also asserted themselves at 1005 hrs that morning, with an enemy scout over Bois de Dôle claimed by 1Lts Cates and Harvey Weir Cook of the 94th, the latter pilot getting the DSC for attacking six adversaries at the start of the action. Bill Loomis was shot down between the lines – he was possibly the 'Nieuport' credited to Offz St Gustav Dörr of *Jasta* 45 at Bruyère at 1100 hrs – although he managed to dash to safety, pursued by Germans and covered by American troops.

1Lts Harold Buckley and Norman S Archibald of the 95th also barely survived a fight with eight Fokkers, and Denny Holden escaped with five holes in his aeroplane, strafing and burning a *Drachen* in its nest during his low-level dash for home.

Fortunately for the battered 1st Pursuit Group, the British Amiens offensive of 8 August diverted JG I and other crack German units north, giving the Americans time to adjust their tactics and deal with problems afflicting their new SPADs. USAS formations, usually limited to flights in the Toul sector, became progressively larger in the course of the Château Thierry campaign in emulation of their adversaries – some of their later operations were organised in full group strength, as the *Jagdgeschwader* did.

The SPAD XIII proved to be another challenge in itself. Nine contractors were building the fighters for French, British, Italian and American use as fast as possible, and their quality was inconsistent to say the least. Of 14 SPADs delivered to the 1st Pursuit Group on 13 July, only one was listed as flyable the next day. The 94th alone reported 124 cases of leaking oil pipes, faulty oil pumps, carburettors, magnetos, gas tanks, gauges, reduction gears and other problems between 18 and 31 July.

'Our mechanics dug into their job with fine spirit', wrote Hartney. 'Although it meant four days for a complete overhaul of the new water-cooled engine against four hours on the air-cooled Monosoupape, they realised the additional risks being taken by the pilots, and accepted the situation with good grace.'

While the groundcrews ironed out the SPADs' bugs, their pilots soldiered on as best they could. On 9 August, 1Lts Dawson, Hewitt and Donaldson of the 27th experienced forced landings and Simonds of the 147th suffered minor injuries after crashing near Château Thierry.

While protecting two French SPAD observation aeroplanes on the 10th, SPAD XIIIs of the 95th were attacked by six Fokkers over Perles. 'I followed one down from 2000 to 1000 metres, giving him about 200 rounds', Walter Avery wrote. 'I was unable to follow him to the ground, as two other Fokkers were on my tail. They had the altitude but drew off after about a five-minute fight. We exchanged about 100 rounds, but one bullet through my aileron was all I got'.

Avery and Buckley shared in downing a D VII (the second victory for both), but 1Lt Irby R Curry was lost. His take-off delayed by engine trouble, 'Rabbit' Curry had been trying to catch up with his patrol when he was wounded, possibly by Ltn Arthur Korff of *Jasta* 60, but managed to reach Allied lines, joined by three escorting French aircraft. At that point, however, he apparently fainted and spun 150 ft into the ground just across the Marne River from the American field hospital at Azy. In spite of efforts to get him to the infirmary, Curry died 20 minutes later.

In addition to Curry, 1Lt Clarence S Gill was wounded near Verdun, while George B Bailey and Denny Holden were driven down in Allied lines. 'He with an explosive bullet in his tank', wrote Holden, 'I with a bullet through my intake manifold and cylinder – besides nine others'.

**1Lt William M Russel became yet another loss to the 95th Aero Squadron on 11 August 1918, probably being killed by Vzfw Karl Strünklenberg of *Jasta* 9 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

The three Americans were probably credited to Vzfw Reinhold Lüdecke (who claimed two SPADs south of Braine), Dietrich Averes and Hans Knappe of *Jasta* 81.

'Next morning, we went out again', wrote Holden. 'We were attacked and Russel was shot and killed. Buck and I attacked a balloon. The observer jumped'. 1Lt William M Russel was probably killed by Vzfw Karl Strünklenberg of *Jasta* 9, who was credited with downing a SPAD south of Reims at 1130 hrs.

Besides unreliable SPADs, the 27th Aero Squadron was having a problem with one of its newer pilots. Born to German immigrants on 19 May 1897, Frank Luke Jnr had grown up in Phoenix, Arizona. Although an indifferent student, he was a star athlete who excelled in rifle and pistol and rode a horse with the best of the local cowboys. Joining the USAS on 27 September 1917, Luke soon displayed equal mastery of aircraft. By March 1918 he was training at the 3rd AIC at Issoudun, where he met Joe Wehner.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on 20 September 1895, Joseph Fritz Wehner was also of German extraction, and after graduating from Exeter Academy, he had worked in Germany with the Young Men's Christian Association. He returned home when war broke out, but even after he enlisted in the USAS, Wehner found himself under frequent scrutiny as a suspected enemy agent. Nothing came of it, save to leave him bitter and distrustful of most company. The guileless Luke became a rare exception.

Leaving Issoudun on 30 May, Luke was assigned to the American Aviation Acceptance Park at Orly, where he made it clear in both word and deed that he had come to fight, not to ferry. His unreliability, which put extra work on other pilots, ultimately led to his transfer, coincident with Wehner's, to the 27th. Still, Luke's reputation as a braggart and malcontent preceded him, and although Hartney perceived his attitude as 'the honest confidence of a zealous but none-too-diplomatic boy', it made a bad impression on squadronmates, especially the few surviving veterans.

On 13 August Hartney accompanied a reconnaissance patrol deep into enemy lines, and in spite of constant harassment by five enemy fighters, he helped bring back vital information for which he was awarded the DSC. On the 16th he led 12 fighters of the 27th and three from the 94th to escort a Salmson of the 88th Aero Squadron. Between Fère-en-Tardenois and Fismes all of the SPADs dropped out with engine trouble, save for Hartney's and Luke's. The two had several combats and became separated.

Hartney landed at Coincy to find 13 SPADs on the ground, their pilots relieved to see him and violently cursing their aeroplanes and the French 'who wished those crocks on us'. Just then Luke came back, nursing his own faulty engine. Hartney dressed him down for not staying with him in the fight, but all Luke said in response was, 'I got a Hun'. Luke was not sure of where it had gone down, however, nor the identity of the enemy aeroplanes he had fought. Hartney believed him, but nobody else did, and Luke's standing in the 1st Pursuit hit rock bottom.

Luke had learned a lesson, though, and pecking away with one finger, he diligently typed up a set of confirmation forms that he would present to witnesses to any aerial victories he claimed thereafter.

Meanwhile, Hartney conferred with his flight leaders on what to do with Luke. Most pilots did not want him in their patrols because of his

1Lt Walter M Smythe and mechanics of the 94th with his Nieuport N6230 'White 4' (which was subsequently flown by 1Lt Alden Sherry) at Saints. Smythe later got a SPAD XIII, only to be killed on 17 August in a mid-air collision with 2Lt Alexander Bruce over Fismes (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

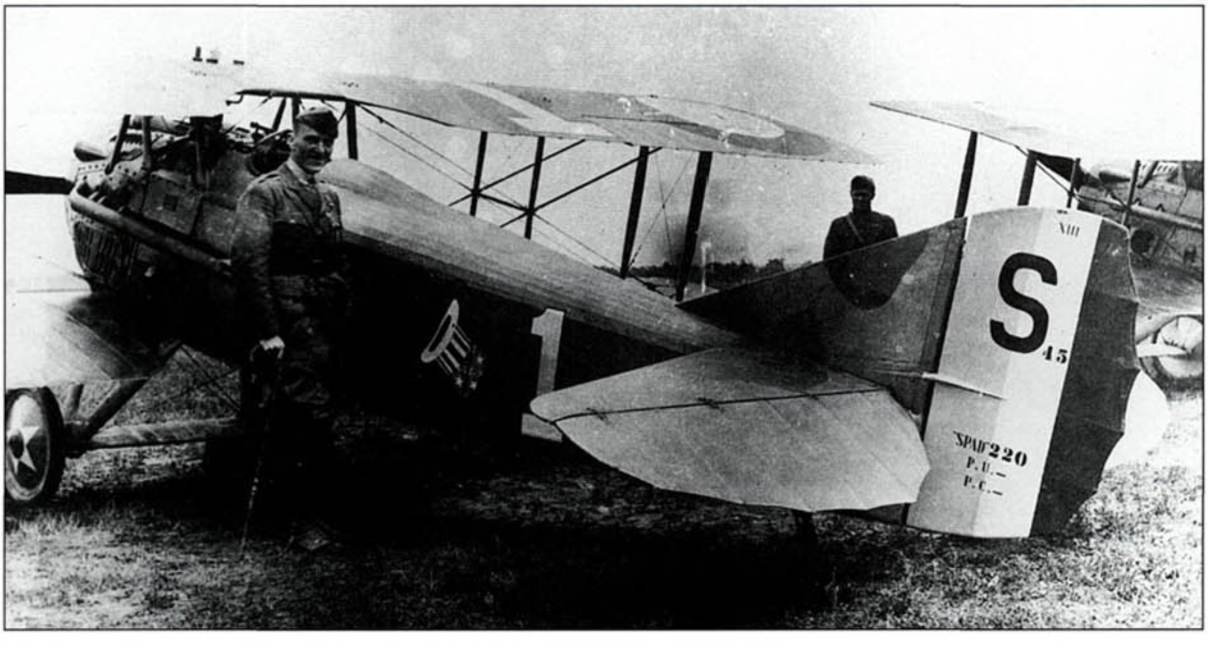
tendency to leave them without warning, but Vasconcells advocated tolerance because he perceived a genuine fearlessness in Luke;

'It isn't courage, exactly. He has no imagination. He can't imagine anything happening to him. He thinks he's invincible. If he ever finds himself he may be almost as good as he thinks he is.'

Hartney led another nine-aeroplane escort for an 88th Salmson at 1705 hrs that afternoon, but upon his return he learned that Ruliff Nevius, delayed ten minutes due to mechanical troubles, had fatally crashed while trying to take off and catch up with the patrol. 'Although he was one of our new men', Hartney lamented, 'I had taken a great fancy to him as a hard-hitting pilot, a plugger who never shirked a patrol and who, I thought, was destined to do great things in the air service'.

The 94th also suffered a tragic loss during a combat over Fismes on 17 August when 2Lt Alexander Bruce's and 1Lt Walter M Smythe's SPADs collided. 'Smythe's wings came off and he dropped like a stone', wrote Holden. 'What was left of him they had to scrape up and put in a sack'. Bruce's body was not mangled, but his neck was broken.

1Lt Rickenbacker seems pleased with his newly Kellner-built SPAD XIII S4523 in August 1918. Although the unit insignia and 'White 1' have been applied – on the right upper wing instead of the left, as would be more usual on 94th machines – the rudder still bears French red-white-blue stripes. These would later be replaced with Americanised ones in blue-white-red (*Greg VanWyngarden*)



The next morning Rickenbacker was unable to get out of bed because of the pain in his still-abscessed ear. Although worried that it would get him invalided out of the 94th, he had no alternative but to leave for another operation. 'During the following week Paris surgeons operated on my troublesome ear in the hospital', he subsequently recalled. 'It has not bothered me since'.

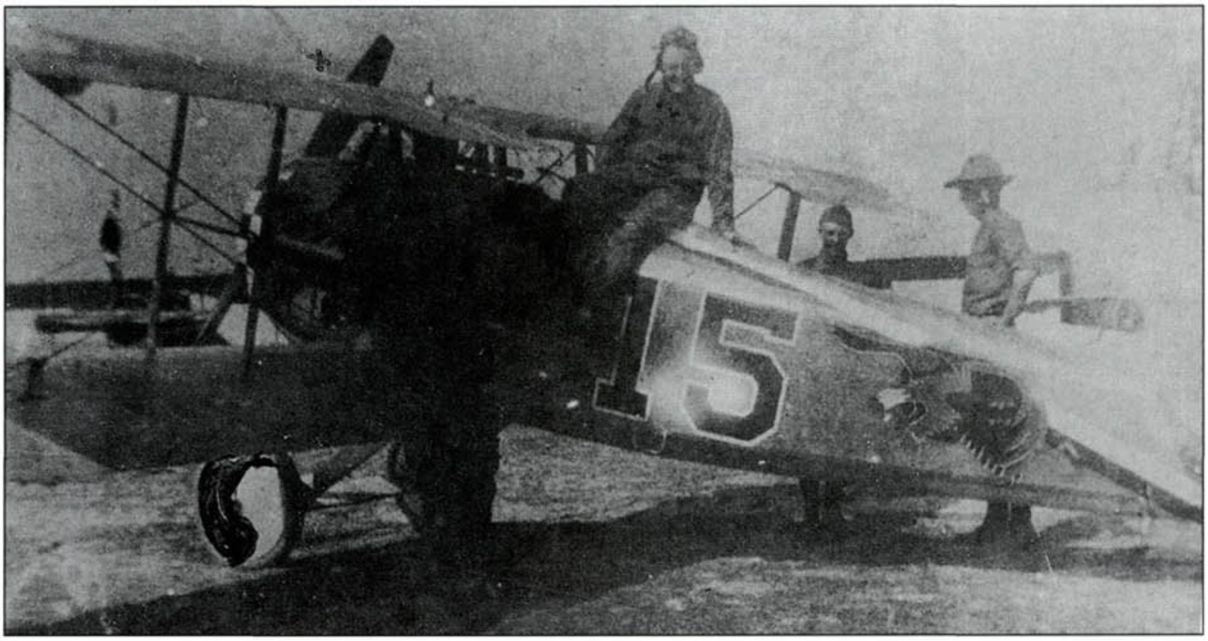
During his convalescence someone suggested that Rickenbacker write a book of his experiences, and he began work on it while keeping better track of his activities in his combat reports and diary. 'Naturally, I did not know that the bulk of my victories were to come', he noted. 'Nor did I know that I should ever live to receive the command of the best air squadron in the American service'.

On 21 August Maj Atkinson was promoted to command the First Pursuit Wing, for which the AEF was organising two new groups, and Maj Hartney was astonished to learn that he would take over the 1st Pursuit Group. Command of the 27th Aero Squadron went to 1Lt Alfred Grant, a veteran flight leader who had been with the unit from its inception at Kelly Field, Texas. A Texas-born West Point graduate, 'Ack' Grant was a strong believer in discipline. While Hartney had allowed Frank Luke to fly alone, Grant put him back on regular flight duties, in spite of the unreliability he continued to display.

The rest of August was spent preparing for a new assignment. On the 30th, the 1st Pursuit Group was relieved of its duties with the French VI *Armée* and moved to Rembercourt aerodrome, back in the Toul sector where it had begun operations. Things had changed, however, for now the 1st, together with the newer 2nd Pursuit Group under Maj Davenport Johnson and the 3rd under Maj William Thaw, would be part of the First Pursuit Wing of the First Army, AEF. And for the first time, the 1st Pursuit would be supporting an Allied offensive centred on an American effort.

The 1st Pursuit had learned much during the fighting around Château Thierry, at a heartbreaking cost. Now its pilots were ready to put those lessons to the test.

**A 27th mechanic added the yin-yang to the original print of this photograph of Maj Hartney's SPAD 'Black 15', marked with his command stripes – the yin-yang also featured on the real thing too. On 21 August Hartney was promoted to lieutenant colonel and put in command of the 1st Pursuit Group (*Jon Guttman*)**



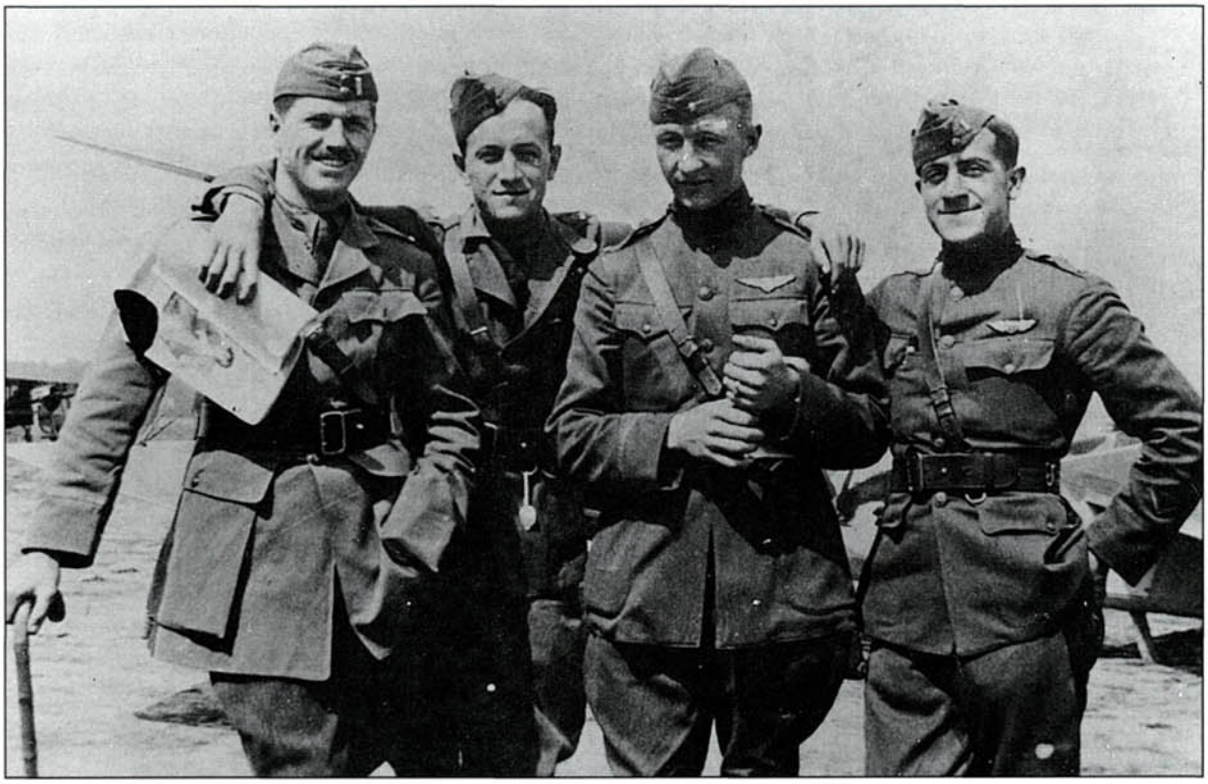
# SPADS OVER ST MIHIEL

The first major American operation of the war was focused on the St Mihiel salient from which Gen John Joseph Pershing, commanding 665,000 troops in 19 divisions, backed by 3220 guns and 267 tanks, aimed to drive back the ten divisions of Gen Max von Gallwitz's *Armee Gruppe* C once and for all. Air support would come from 1476 aircraft, including attached French *groupes* and even three Italian Caproni bomber squadrons, under the overall command of Brig Gen 'Billy' Mitchell. Although not officially attached to the AEF, the nine British bomber squadrons of Maj Gen Hugh Trenchard's Independent Force also lent voluntary support.

The build-up of Allied air units in the sector had not gone unnoticed. During the summer the Germans had moved the Fokker D VII-equipped *Jasta* 18 in to bolster the local *Jagdstaffeln*, followed by *Jasta* 54s and 77b, and on 3 September the formidable JG II, now commanded by Hptm Oskar von Bönigk.

The 1st Pursuit Group suffered one loss prior to the offensive's opening day. On 8 September 1Lt Norman Archibald of the 95th Aero Squadron was brought down by flak near Étain and captured. He later wrote a book on his experiences, entitled *Heaven High, Hell Deep*.

**1Lts Sumner Sewall, Lucas Proudfit, Granville O Woodard and Norman Archibald pose in front of Sewall's SPAD XIII 'White 0' as the 95th Aero Squadron prepares to move to Rembercourt aerodrome for the St Mihiel offensive. Archibald would become a PoW before the offensive began, and Woodard would also end up as a 'guest of the Kaiser' on 29 September (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



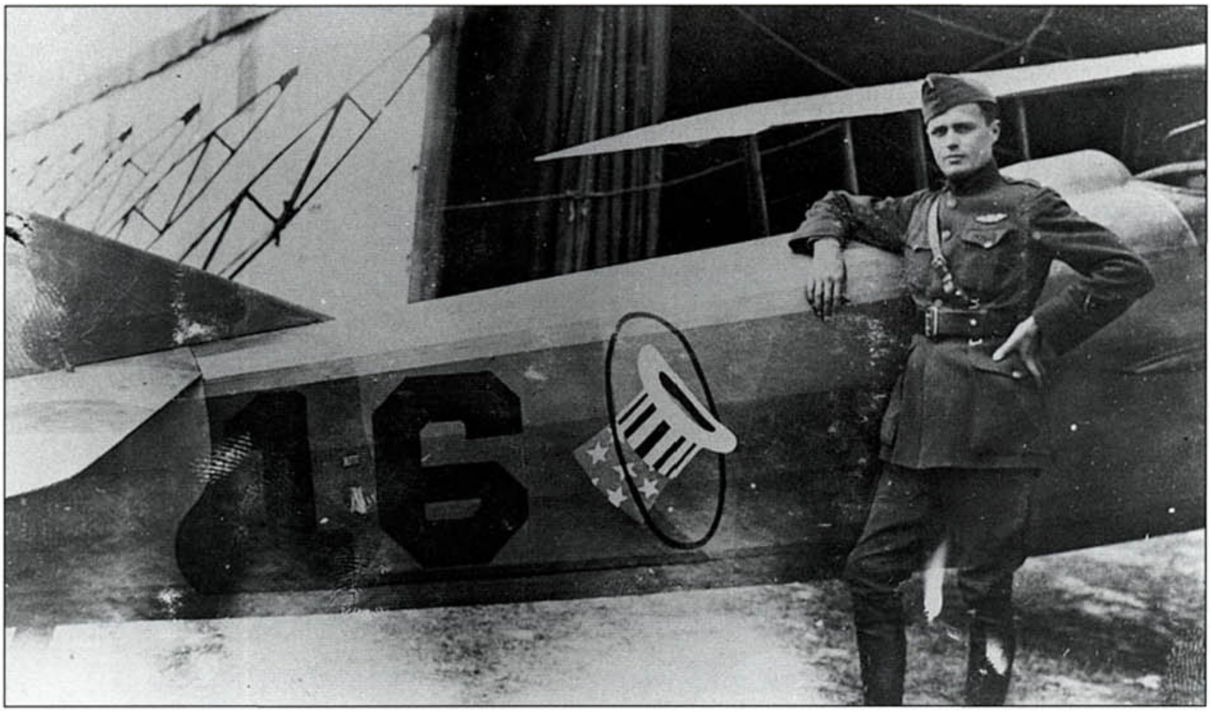
**1Lt Norman Archibald in his SPAD. Brought down by flak on 8 September, he later wrote a book about his experiences, entitled *Heaven High, Hell Deep* (*Michael Hamaty via Charles Woolley*)**

The St Mihiel drive commenced on 12 September amid wind and rain that severely limited air operations. In spite of that, progress on the ground exceeded expectations. The Germans, knowing their salient was vulnerable, were in the process of withdrawing when the Americans struck, capturing some 15,000 men and 257 guns, and liberating 200 square miles of French territory in six days. This encouraging success cost Pershing only 7000 casualties – one-third of what the Army Medical Corps had anticipated.

American squadrons flew missions whenever the weather allowed that first day, but only one 1st Pursuit Group member scored a victory – and it was the last man anyone expected. The night before, Frank Luke had heard Jerry Vasconcells give his appraisal of *Drachen* as targets. 'Any man who gets a balloon has my respect, because he's got to be good or he doesn't get it'.

On the morning of the 12th, eight SPADs of the 27th Aero Squadron were on patrol when Luke, as usual, dropped out of formation. He did not return until 0930 hrs the next morning, when he handed in the following combat report;

'Saw 3 enemy aircraft bear Lavigneulle and gave chase following them directly east towards Pont-à-Mousson where they disappeared towards Metz. Saw enemy balloon at Marieville. Destroyed it after three passes at it, each within a few yards of the balloon. The third pass was made when



2Lt Samuel Kaye Jnr stands beside his Blériot-built SPAD S15130 'Yellow 16' at about the time of its assignment to him on 6 September. Joining the 94th on 16 July, the young Mississippian would earn a place among its most reliable pilots (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

the balloon was very near the ground. Both guns stopped so pulled off to one side. Fixed left gun and turned to make one final effort to burn it, but saw it started, the next instant it burst into great flames and dropped on the winch, destroying it.'

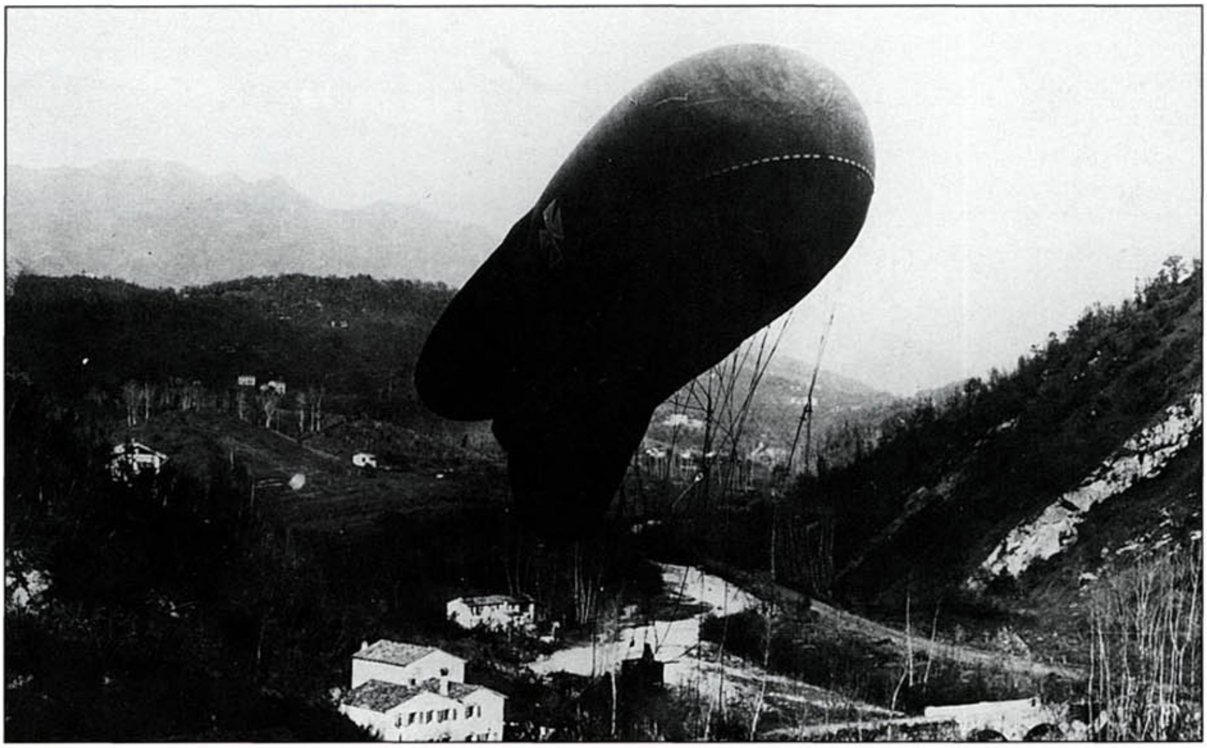
After returning to American lines, Luke landed, picked out two officers from the crowd that gathered round him and had them fill out two of his confirmation forms in indelible pencil. Then, remarking, 'Guess that'll hold 'em', he took off. He did not get far, however, before engine trouble forced him to land, delaying his return. Luke's SPAD, riddled by ground fire, was subsequently written off – the first of five that he would bring back damaged beyond repair in the next two weeks.

Even with frontline testimony Luke's first victory was not officially confirmed until 26 September, but Hartney took the liberty of counting it in order to encourage him. Meanwhile, the Germans knew what he had done. Ltn Willy Klemm had just received his commission when he came down mortally wounded in the basket of the balloon Luke destroyed that morning.

Air action intensified on 13 September, but again success seemed to elude the 1st Pursuit Group. That changed on the 14th. At 0815 hrs Rickenbacker dived on four Fokkers he had seen pursuing some American aeroplanes and sent one down smoking near Villency. Moments later, however, he reported that 'I found myself staring full into three beautiful scarlet noses headed straight in my direction'. Although he regarded those Germans as 'the finest fliers' he ever faced, Rickenbacker said 'I did some fancy flying too, from sheer fright', and managed to elude them. The Fokker was credited as his first victory since 30 May, and his seventh overall.

Sumner Sewall was at the tail end of a 95th Aero Squadron patrol north-west of Lake Lachaussée at 0900 hrs when a Fokker flown by JG II's commander, Oblt von Boenigk, jumped him from behind and set his fuel tank ablaze. Sewall, trying to keep the flames away from his cockpit, went

The 1st Pursuit Group's opening aerial victory of the St Mihiel drive was a balloon destroyed on 12 September by its most maligned member, 2Lt Frank Luke Jnr of the 27th Aero Squadron, whose fortunes were about to take a meteoric turn (*Greg VanWyngarden*)



**A German Type AE balloon, based on the more advanced French Caquot design, rises from its heavily defended nest. The fast, remarkably durable SPAD XIII allowed the 1st Pursuit Group to declare open season on the gasbags, with Frank Luke zealously taking the lead (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

into a power dive, pursued by the Fokkers, until von Boenigk, convinced he was doomed, finally disengaged – at which point the fire blew out, allowing Sewall to crash-land in Allied lines.

Moments after he had crawled out from the charred remains of his SPAD, an object brushed Sewall's elbow and landed with a thud at his feet. It was the wheel of his fighter, which had come off during his dive. Von Boenigk claimed a second SPAD in the fight, but its pilot, John Mitchell, also force-landed in friendly territory, near Troyon-sur-Meuse.

That morning Hartney got a call from Col Thomas DeW Milling, Gen Mitchell's chief-of-staff, telling him that 'there's a saucy sausage over there at Boinville and another at Buzy which you must knock off in the next hour or two if you can'. Hartney hastily worked out a three-pronged attack involving the 27th Aero Squadron, and within ten minutes of devising his plan he was visited by – 'Ack' Grant, Kenneth Clapp, Leo Dawson and Thomas F Lennon. Clapp spoke for them;

'Major, we've been elected today to get that balloon. Evidently you don't like your old gang in the 27th any more and want to get rid of us. You've detailed us to do the job and to name the man to go down on that sausage. Now, here's the proposition – Grant and I are going to put your boyfriend Luke on that assignment. If he gets it, he stays in the 27th. If he fails, you'll okay a transfer to some other outfit or to the rear. He's a menace to morale.'

Hartney agreed, but it took two missions to eliminate the balloons. In the first, Dawson, Lennon and Luke perforated the Boinville *Drachen*, Luke making six passes at it, clearing two stoppages in the process, and strafing the flak battery as well. 'The last time I saw the balloon it was on the ground in a very flabby condition', Luke reported.

Hartney accompanied the second sortie in which Luke, reverting to form, broke formation prematurely at 1430 hrs to dive on and burn

Bz 14's gasbag at Buzy, forcing Vzfw Munchoff and Gfr Gasser to take to their parachutes. Eight Fokkers attacked Luke, but Joe Wehner was there to send one spinning down to crash near Warcq, force another to land and cover his friend's exit.

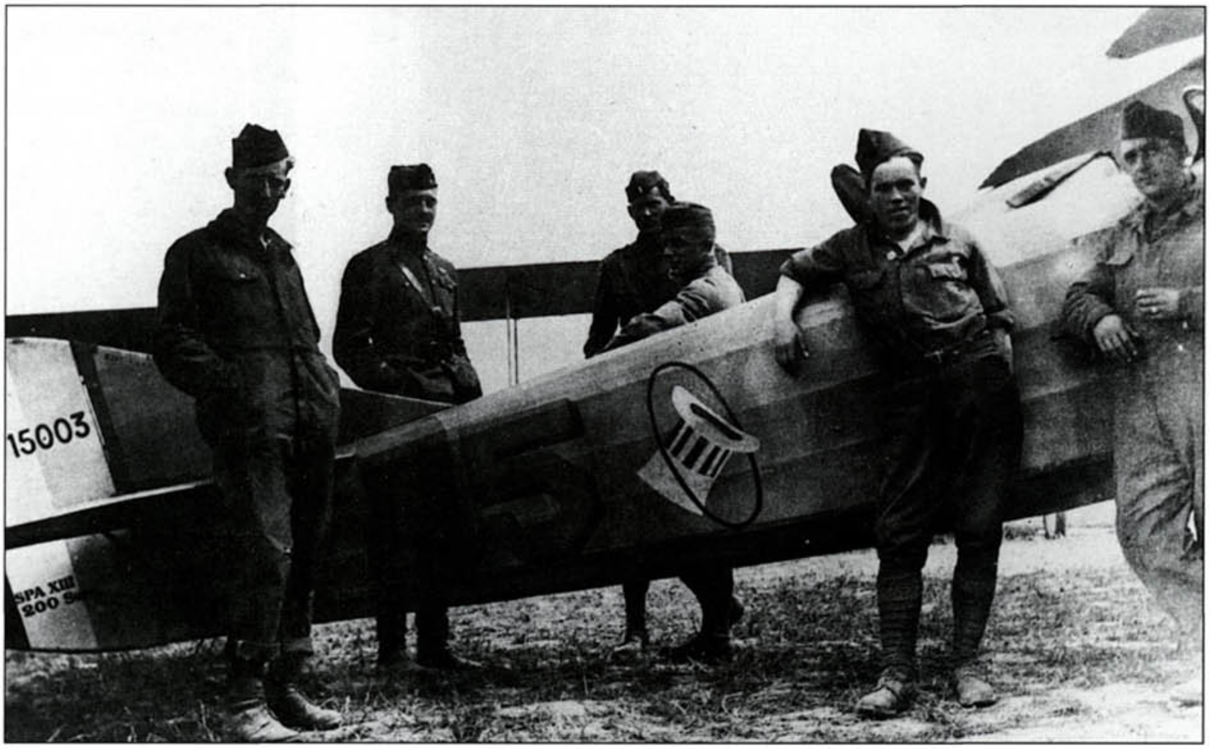
The day's actions were a turning point for Luke, as Dawson summed up in a reappraisal he gave Hartney afterwards;

'Listen, Major, we want to take that all back. Boy, if anyone thinks that bird is yellow he's crazy. I'll take back every doubt I ever had. The man's not yellow – he's crazy, stark mad. He went by me on that attack like a wild man. I thought he was diving right into the fabric. Then, after he set the balloon afire, I saw him take another swoop down on it. He was pouring fire on fire, and a hydrogen one at that.'

Luke's SPAD had returned in shreds, but he wanted to 'borrow' Hoover's aeroplane to go after a third gasbag without further ado. Grant refused. 'You're his flight commander, Clapp', he remarked. 'I hold you responsible. He's making a burlesque of the 27th, and I'm not going to stand it. Balloons or no balloons, we must have discipline'.

Wehner went after the third *Drachen* on his own, only to see a French SPAD beat him to it – either MdL Georges Halberger or Emmanuel Aubailly of SPA153, who shared in 'roasting a sausage' at Goin at 1640 hrs. The Frenchman then came under attack from a *Staffel* of Fokkers, but again Wehner intervened and claimed two of them. Oddly, while Luke now had two balloons confirmed – and a third pending – none of Wehner's claims that day were credited to him.

To finish the afternoon Wilbert White of the 147th was protecting three observation aeroplanes near Étain when three aggressive Halberstadt two-seaters positioned themselves between him and the lines. White fought his way through and drew them after him, away from the Allied two-seaters.



**Assigned on 14 July, and here shown still in French rudder markings, with (from left to right) 1Lts Charles I Crocker, Bill Loomis and Wyley S Sparks, as well as members of Crocker's groundcrew, SPAD S15003 'Yellow 15' of the 94th Aero Squadron was wrecked when it crashed into Hill 334 near St Mihiel on 14 September. Its pilot, Crocker, survived, however (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

Shaking them off by flying into a cloud, at 1645 hrs White emerged to find a German balloon east of Chambley and he attacked it. 'They immediately started pulling it down and firing at me from the ground', White wrote in a letter to his wife. 'Just then, two scout aeroplanes dove on me from the front. I pulled up and fired point blank at the first, and he went into a nose-dive. The second one I fired on and then dove under, crossing the lines and coming home'.

White was credited with the balloon and a Fokker. The latter's identity and true fate cannot be ascertained, but Bz 152's records confirmed the loss of its *Drachen.* Rickenbacker claimed a Fokker D VII out of control over the Bois de Waville on the 15th and was hailed as the top-scoring American ace alive. 'It was an honour for which I had risked my life many times', he wrote, 'but I had a strange feeling of dread. Four other fliers had held that title. All were dead'.

At 0930 hrs eight SPADs from 'A' and 'B' flights of the 147th took off to 'Patrol lines between Châtillon-sous-les-Côtes and Etang-de-Lachaussée'. Engine problems with his SPAD S15221 delayed 1Lt Ernest A Love's take off by three or four minutes, but he tried to catch up with his flight. Meanwhile, the 147th patrol, led by 1Lt Brotherton, sighted much

**1Lt Ernest A Love of the 147th Aero Squadron with his SPAD S15221 'White 7'. Shot down by Ltn Franz Büchner of *Jasta* 13 on 15 September, Love died of his injuries the next day (*Alan Roesler*)**

enemy air activity, but returned without incident, other than to note, 'Lt E A Love has not yet returned from this patrol, or has word been heard of his whereabouts'.

Love was apparently still looking for his flight when he encountered Fokkers of *Jasta* 13 over Lake Lachaussée. He was shot down by its commander, Ltn Franz Büchner, as his second victory of the day, and 28th to date. Love force-landed his burning SPAD at Tronville, where a French priest took him to his church in which the Germans had established a field hospital, and tried to care for his badly shattered left knee and mangled left forearm and hand. Love succumbed to his wounds the next day, however.

During a 27th Aero Squadron patrol that morning Luke suddenly dropped out of his flight to streak down and attack a replacement balloon at Boinville, destroying it with 125 rounds. Ltn Wenzel of Bz 18 parachuted safely, and later stated postwar that his *Drachen* had been the target of numerous French, British, Belgian and US fighters before Luke ended its long career. German fighters descended on Luke, but Wehner intervened, sending a Fokker spiralling down to crash near Rouvers (confirmed as his first victory) and an Albatros down in a steep dive.

Luke then spotted Bz 35's gasbag near Bois d'Hingry, and he and Wehner set it afire. In a solo outing that evening Luke burned Bz 52's *Drachen* near Chaumont at 1950 hrs, but lost his bearings and landed in a wheat field at Agers at 2130 hrs. When he returned, he spoke of two balloons he had spotted at Romagne and Reville, north of Verdun, which he and Wehner planned to despatch the next day, grandly declaring, 'We'll burn them up as fast as they bring them along'.

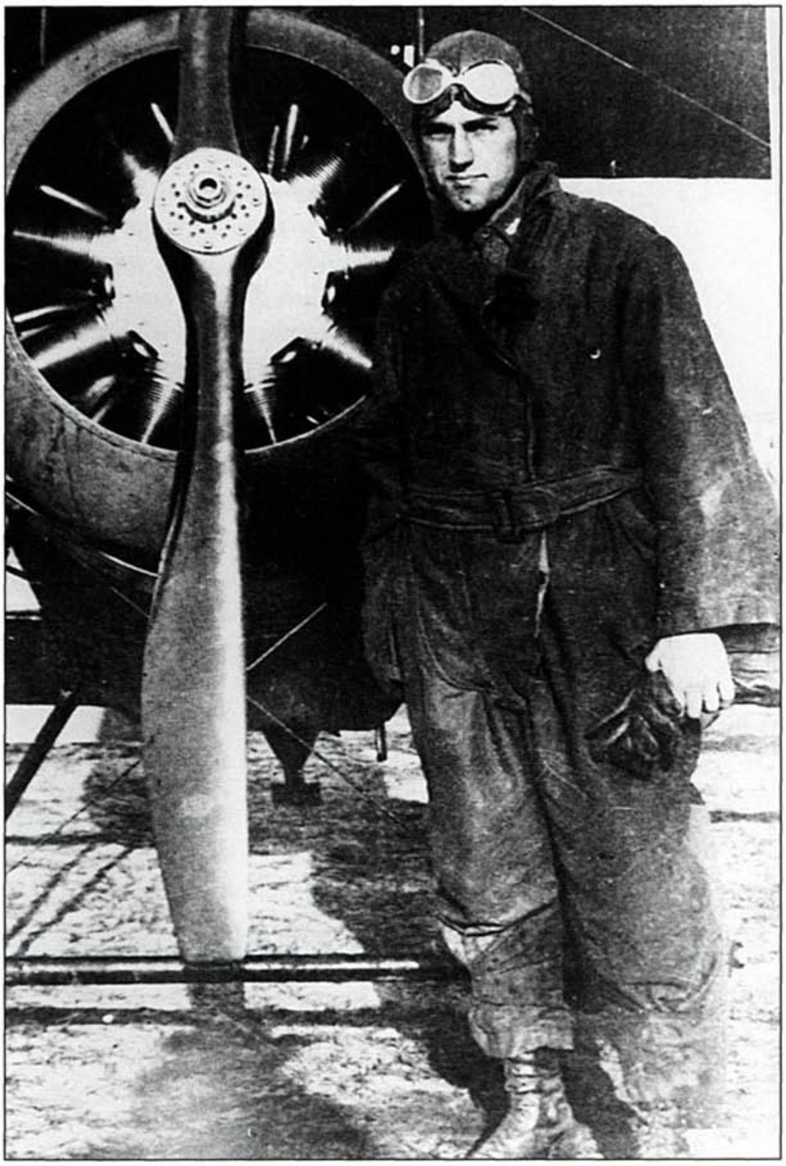
By the 16th the AEF had accomplished most of its goals, and fighting on the ground and in the air both wound down accordingly. During a 147th sortie to protect Salmsons of the 99th Aero Squadron, however, 1Lt Louis Simon dropped out with engine trouble, only to run into three Hannover CL IIIas. Getting onto the tail of one of the aircraft, he claimed it in flames over Hadonville-les-Lachaussée at 1245 hrs, then nursed his ailing SPAD home, crossing the lines at an altitude of 400 metres.

That evening Lt Col Hartney and 1Lt Grant hosted Gen Mitchell and his staff to a 'show' performed by Luke and Wehner, who took off at 1905 hrs and burned the balloon at Reville, which fell on its parachuting observer. The two became separated amid the intense flak directed at them, and as Wehner went after the gasbag at Romagne, he saw Luke destroy it in flames at 1940 hrs.

Wehner then spotted and destroyed an unscheduled third *Drachen* at Mangiennes five minutes later. Both men landed in the dark unharmed, although their SPADs were thoroughly shot up. Mitchell called the action 'one of the most remarkable feats in the military career of a youngster that was nothing short of amazing'.

Rickenbacker was also a witness to the exploit, and he commented on the difference in temperament of the men who performed it;

'Laughing and well pleased with his success, Luke jumped out and came running over to us to receive our heartiest congratulations. Luke would come back to the aerodrome and excitedly tell everyone about it, but no word would Wehner say on the subject. In fact Joe Wehner never spoke except in monosyllables on any subject. After a successful combat he



**1Lt Joseph F Wehner, shown here while in training, flew 'top cover' for Frank Luke in his balloon-busting attacks from 14 to 18 September, being credited with a Fokker and a share in a gasbag with Luke on 15 September. The next day, while Brig Gen William Mitchell watched, Luke burned two balloons and Wehner got an 'unscheduled' third (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

would put in the briefest possible report and sign his name. None of us ever heard him describe how he brought the enemy machine down.'

Odd couple they may have been, but Luke had accounted for eight enemy balloons, while Wehner was credited with two balloons and two aircraft. In only five days the Arizona boaster and the suspected German spy from Massachusetts had transformed themselves into the most talked-about phenomena in the USAS.

The 17th only saw another loss to the 1st Pursuit. At 1430 hrs the 95th Aero Squadron despatched seven SPADs on a balloon-busting mission, but they ran into *Jasta* 15's Fokkers over Lake Lachaussée, where 1Lt Heinrichs fell victim to Ltn von Hantelmann at 1510 hrs. 'An explosive bullet hit me in the left cheek and knocked out 16 teeth', Heinrichs later wrote, 'breaking both my jaws and then tearing through the windshield, breaking it also. I remember spitting out teeth and blood as I turned for our lines.

'I pulled a "renversement" and came out underneath the chap who was firing at me from behind. Two more explosive bullets hit me in the left arm, tearing through and breaking my left elbow. Two broke in my right hand, nearly taking off my right small finger. Another hit me in the left thigh, one in the left ankle and one in the right heel. Two more hit me in the leg. I saw my left arm hanging broken by my side.'

In spite of his grievous wounds, Heinrichs managed to crash-land his aeroplane and remained conscious while his German captors tended his wounds with a first-aid kit and waited for stretcher bearers to take him to a field hospital. For the rest of his time as a PoW, Heinrichs endured terrible pain with the consolation that at least he was still alive.

Back at the 95th, Bill Taylor, who had returned on 5 September eager for action, fell into a depression – a nurse with whom he had fallen in love had ended the relationship, and now his best friend 1Lt Heinrichs had been shot down. He quickly found an outlet for his despondency. 'The goddam Huns have killed Waldo', he said. 'Now they are going to pay'.

Taylor got his chance the next day even as the St Mihiel campaign was officially concluding. At 1405 hrs a patrol of the 95th took off and encountered five Fokkers. Sewall was credited with one over Landres at 1635 hrs for his ace-making fifth victory, but Taylor was eternally denied his bid to avenge Heinrichs.

'I was with Bill', wrote Denny Holden. 'We started for balloons, but Fokkers drove us back. I got separated from him, then saw three Fokkers dive through the clouds. I turned after them but they had gone. I saw an

**Nearing the peak of his fame, 2Lt Luke poses with a captured German Maxim machine gun. Luke was in fact an accomplished marksman, and Kenneth Porter recalled, 'He spent all his leisure time shooting' (*Jon Guttman*)**

aeroplane burning on the ground, and two days later found out that it was Bill – shot down in flames'. Killed over Dampvioux, Taylor was credited to Ltn Büchner of *Jasta* 13.

## LUKE'S TRAGIC ZENITH

The last day of the St Mihiel campaign was to witness further drama when the 27th Aero Squadron's new shooting stars, Luke and Wehner, took off on another foray. Neither returned, but later Hartney got reports from the 42nd Division that Luke had downed an enemy two-seater, landed nearby and spent the night with his SPAD parked under a 16-in railway gun.

When Hartney, Rickenbacker and one of the group's YMCA volunteers drove over, Luke just looked up disconsolately and said, 'Wehner isn't back yet, is he Major?' He barely spoke during the ride back, save to tell Hartney, 'Major, I'm glad it wasn't me. My mother doesn't know I'm on the front yet'.

Luke's combat report described what he knew;

'Lt Wehner and I left the airdrome at 1600 hrs to spot enemy balloons. Over St Mihiel we saw two German balloons near Labeuville. We manoeuvred in the clouds and dropped down, burning both. We were then attacked by a number of enemy aircraft, with the main formation attacking Lt Wehner, who was above and on one side. I started climbing to join the fight when two enemy aircraft attacked me from the rear.

**On 18 September 1918, LFC pilot Adjutant Reginald Sinclaire of *escadrille* SPA68 recalled he and Sous Lt Pierre Gaudermen encountering a 'German photographic aeroplane whose pilot evidently had orders to get the pictures'. After two hours and three attempts, they finally cut off its escape. 'At the same time', Sinclaire said, 'an American SPAD came up under his tail, also shooting, and landed where the German fell' (*Jon Guttman*)**

I turned on them, opening both guns on the leader. We came head on until within a few yards of each other, when my opponent turned to one side in a nose dive, and I saw him crash on the ground. I then turned on the second, shot a short burst and he turned and went into a dive.

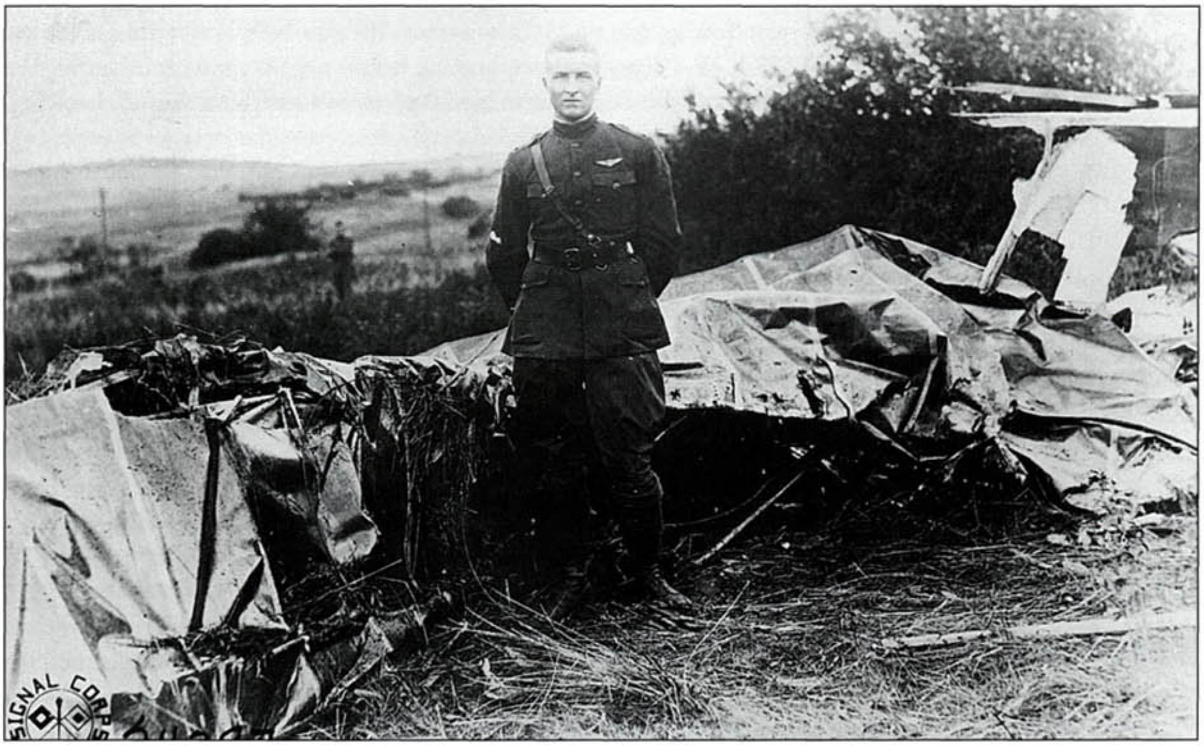
'I saw a number of enemy aircraft above, but could not find Lt Wehner, so turned and made for our lines. The above fight occurred in the vicinity of St Hilaire. On reaching our balloon line, I flew east. Saw "archie" on our side, flew towards it and found an enemy observation machine. I gave chase with some other SPADs, and we got him off from his lines, and after a short encounter he crashed, within our lines, southeast of Verdun. Lt Wehner is entitled to share in the victories over both the balloons. Confirmations requested, two balloons and three aeroplanes.'

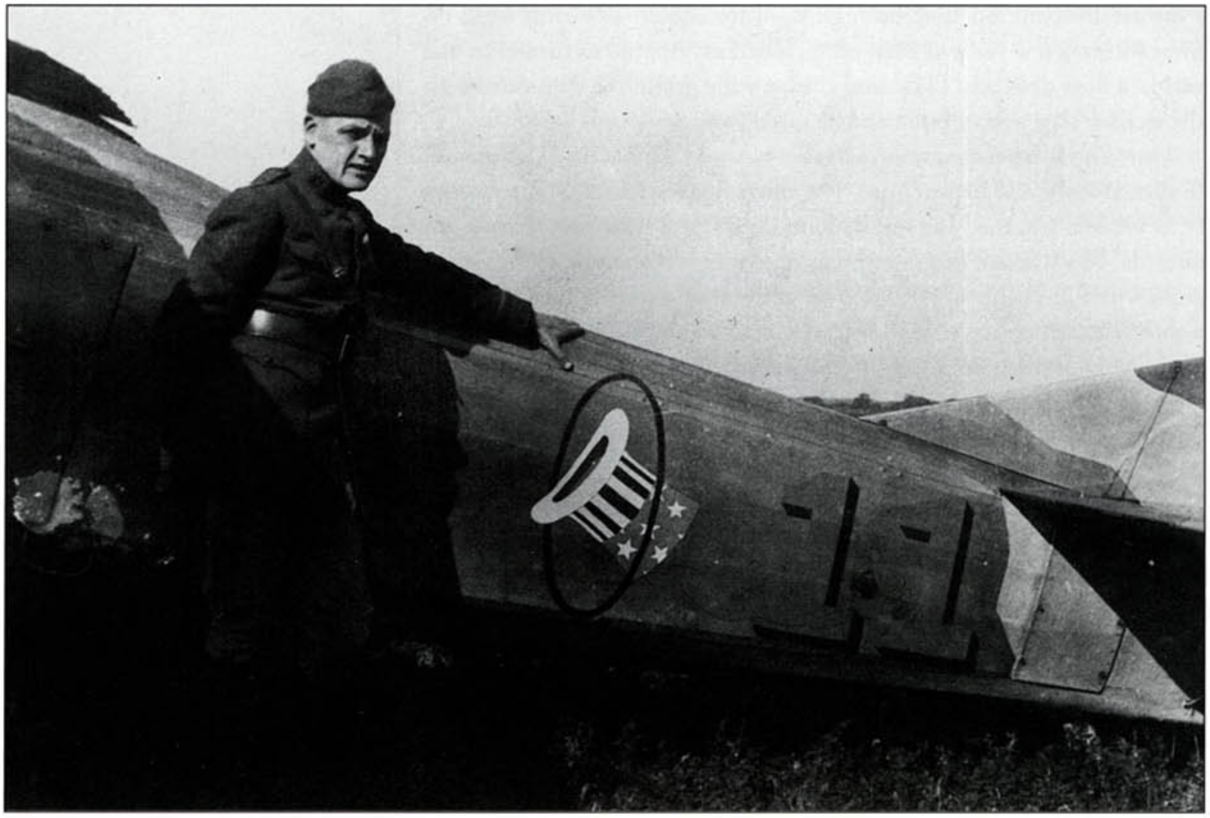
Luke had scored five victories between 1640 hrs and 1710 hrs. His last, over an LVG whose crew, Ltns Ernst Höhne and Ernst Schultz of Fl Abt 36, were killed, was shared with Sous-Lt Pierre Gaudermen and Adjutant Reginald Sinclaire of SPA68. The two Fokker pilots Luke had out-fought apparently survived, but Joe Wehner had been shot down by Ltn von Hantelmann of *Jasta* 15, and breathed his last in a German field hospital. Luke's testimony put his late friend in the ranks of the aces, with an official tally of six.

After a festive dinner given in his honour by the 94th Aero Squadron on the night of 19 September, Luke was sent on leave to Orly – and nearby Paris – but he was in no mood for rest or revels. Meanwhile, the AEF spent the next eight days preparing for a more ambitious offensive in the Argonne Forest.

On 24 September, two days before the new offensive, Kenneth Marr returned to the 94th Aero Squadron from Paris to announce that he had been relieved of his command. Although he had been promoted to major on the 17th, Marr's health, long undermined by a previous gassing and

**Luke's face betrays conflicting emotions as he poses by his fifth victory, claimed within half-an-hour of his first during the late afternoon of 19 September. The LVG was jointly credited with Gaudermen and Sinclaire of SPA68. The German crewmen, Ltns Ernst Höhne and Ernst Schultz of Fl Abt 36, were killed – but nearby, so had Luke's wingman, Joe Wehner (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**





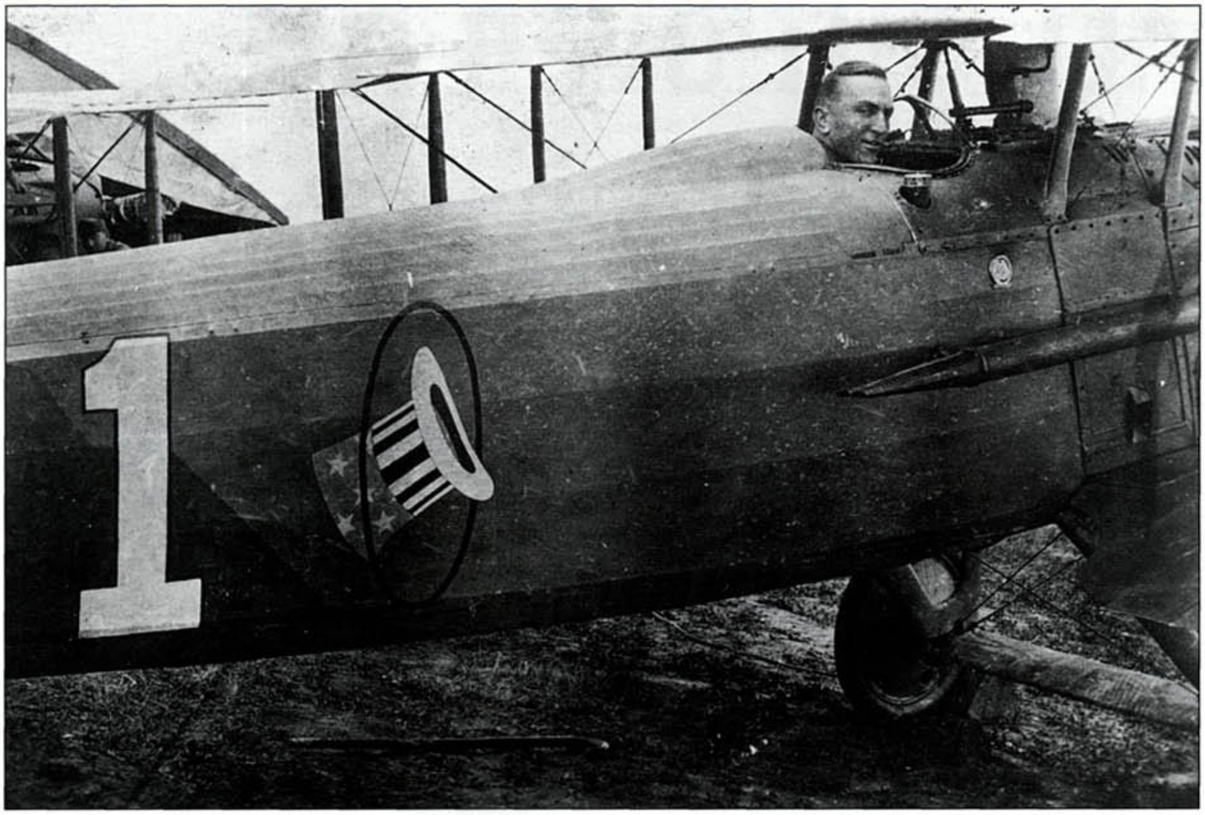
**1Lt Reed Chambers poses before his SPAD S4526 at Rembercourt, the fighter bearing a 'Yellow 11' highlighted in red on its fuselage. A former Tennessee National Guardsman, Chambers had been a 94th 'stalwart' from its combat debut, but had scored no confirmed victories. That, however, was about to change (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

combat injuries, combined with his generally unsatisfactory leadership, had led to the decision to bring him home for Stateside duties. His place as unit CO was to be taken the next day by the newly promoted Capt Eddie Rickenbacker.

'My pride and pleasure at receiving this great honour I cannot put into words', Rickenbacker wrote. After a visit to the operations office and confirming that Frank Luke's recent balloon busting spree had made the 27th Aero Squadron's top-scoring fighter unit in the AEF, exceeding the 94th's tally by six, Rick called his pilots to a half-hour session, resolving, 'No other American squadron at the front would ever again be permitted to approach our margin of supremacy'. He then had a half-hour 'caucus' with the mechanics, calling for their help in seeing that the 94th's SPADs, and their engines, would be in perfect running order at all times.

'Finally', Rickenbacker wrote, 'I had a long and serious conference with myself that night'. His conclusion regarding his new role was, 'I would lead them by example, as well as precept. I would accompany the new pilots and watch their errors, and help them to feel more confidence by sharing their dangers. Above all, I would work harder than I ever did as a mere pilot'.

Rickenbacker started the next morning with a lone patrol over Verdun and Douaumont. Soon after turning east toward Étain, he spotted two German two-seaters (identified as LVGs by him, but as Halberstadts in his citation) on a photographic mission, escorted from above by five Fokkers. 'Climbing for the sun for all I was worth', he wrote, 'I soon had the satisfaction of realising that I had escaped their notice and was now well in their rear. I shut down my engine, put down my nose and made a bee line for the nearest Fokker'. Catching the D VII by surprise, Rick fired a long burst and reported that it crashed near Billy at 0840 hrs.



**Rickenbacker in SPAD S4523, showing his St Christopher medallion under the right cockpit. On 25 September he was promoted to captain, given command of the 94th Aero Squadron and flew a sortie that would eventually earn him the Medal of Honor (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

'It had been my intention to zoom upward and protect myself against the expected attack from the four remaining Fokkers as soon as I had finished the first man', Rick continued, 'but when I saw the effect of my attack on the dumbfounded Boches, I instantly changed my tactics and plunged straight through their formation to attack the photographing LVGs ahead'. The two-seaters supported each other well, thwarting several attempts until Rick 'decided upon one bold attack, and if this failed I would get back to my own lines before it was too late'.

'Watching my two adversaries closely', he continued, 'I suddenly found an opening between them. They were flying parallel to each other and not 50 yards apart. Dropping down in a sideslip until I had one machine between me and the other, I straightened out smartly, levelled my SPAD and began firing. The nearest Boche passed directly through my line of fire, and just as I ceased firing I had the satisfaction of seeing him burst into flames'. Then, as the regrouped Fokkers dived on him, Rickenbacker said 'I put on the gas and headed for my own lines'.

There has been some dispute as to how substantial Rickenbacker's claims have been over the years – they certainly have not stood up to scrutiny as well as Doug Campbell's. But while no German loss has turned up to match his Fokker claim, the deaths of Sgt Heinrich Lender, a pilot of Fl Abt 36 at Jametz, and his observer Lt d R Fritz Knipp over 'Maas-Ost' on that day seem to fit Rick's two-seater in flames.

Rickenbacker was pleased to have pulled off a successful ambush against such numerical odds to score his first double victory, but something lay 12 years ahead to make his first day of command even more memorable. On 6 November 1930 he received the Medal of Honor from President Herbert Hoover for his action of 25 September 1918.

# ALL-OUT OVER THE ARGONNE

The Meuse-Argonne offensive saw the AEF encountering much more difficult terrain than it had around St Mihiel, while opposed by a determined enemy who had had plenty of time to prepare defences in depth. The intensity of the six-week land campaign was matched in the air. The USAS was stronger and its pilots more experienced, but the Germans were now aware that JG II and the local *Jastas*, in spite of their successes during the St Mihiel campaign, would not be enough against the growing American preponderance in the air. In consequence JG I was transferred from fighting the British to tackling the Americans. The 'Circus' came to town – in this case Metz-Frescaty airfield – on 25 September, just 24 hours before the offensive began.

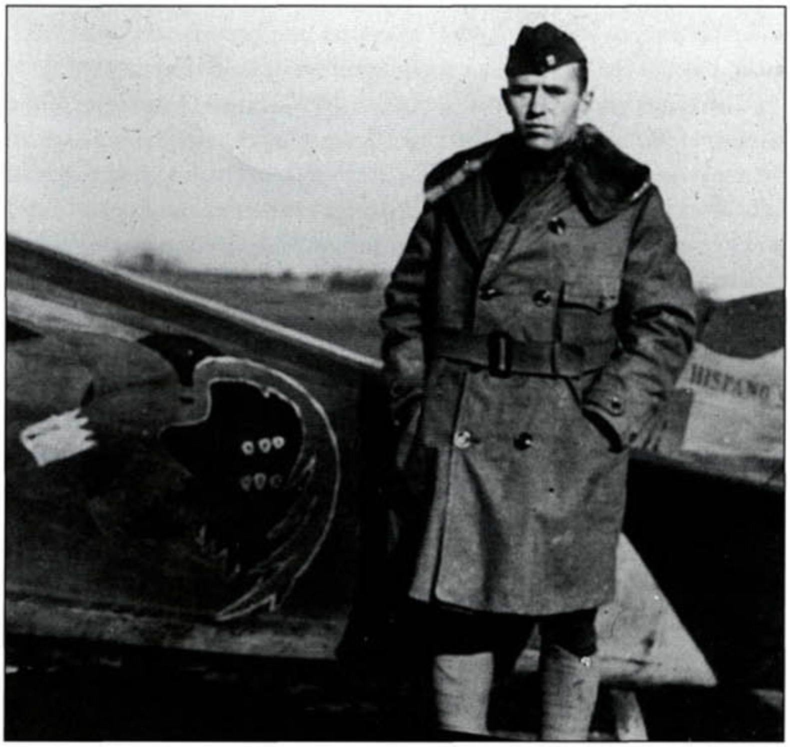
That night the Americans unleashed a barrage from 3928 guns, and at 0530 hrs on 26 September, troops from nine divisions advanced through the dawn mist. Only five German divisions opposed them, but they were well entrenched in three defence lines or *Stellungen*, bearing the Wagnerian names of 'Giselher', 'Kreimhilde' and 'Freya', and unlike their comrades at St Mihiel, they had no plans to withdraw – not with a four-track railway at their backs that was vital to sustain the German war effort to the north.

As the American drive slowed, both sides committed more soldiers to the contest – some 400,000 Americans of the First and Second armies, plus the adjacent French XVII Corps, against 40 German divisions, primarily from Gen Georg von der Marwitz's V. *Armee*.

The First Pursuit Wing's job for the morning involved Hartney's 1st Pursuit Group clearing the sky of enemy observation aeroplanes and balloons, while the 2nd and 3rd Pursuit Groups provided top cover. 'It has been low flying at 600 metres', wrote Denny Holden. 'The 2nd Pursuit Group flies at 2000 metres and the 3rd at 5000 metres, so we have kept the air pretty well cleaned'.

The scoring began with Reed Chambers of the 94th burning a *Drachen* at Nantillois for his first victory at 0552 hrs and Vasconcells of the 27th destroying another at Lisson one minute later. Rickenbacker was going after the same balloon as

**1Lt Jerry Vasconcells claimed a balloon burned at Lisson on the opening morning of the Meuse-Argonne offensive on 26 September. Seen here photographed beside SPAD 'Black 13' of the 27th Aero Squadron, this success gave Vasconcells his third victory (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



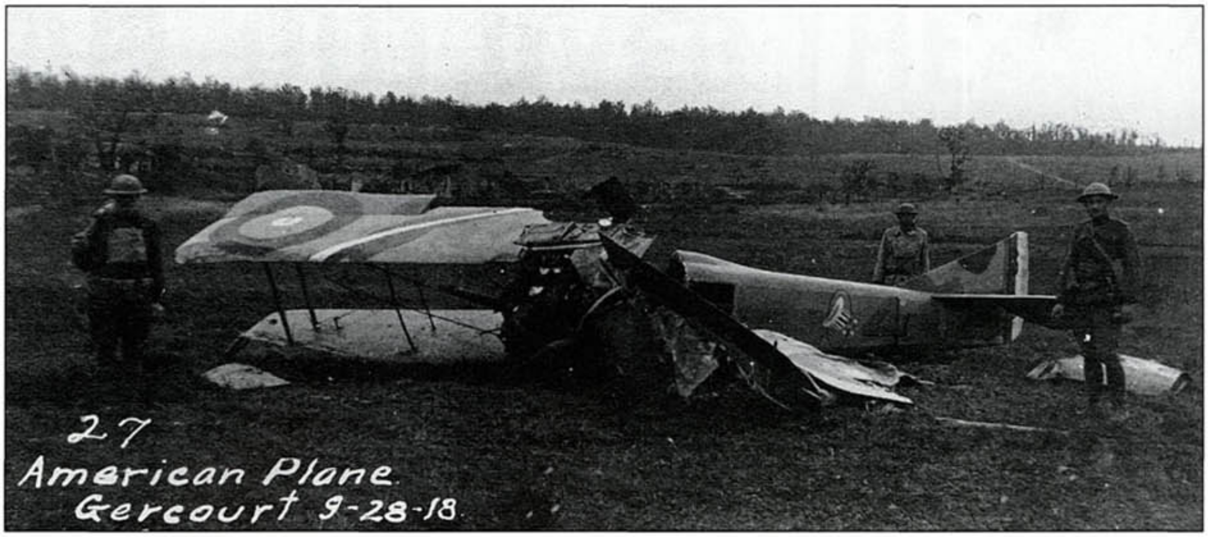
Vasconcells when he was startled to find a Fokker flying alongside him. The two turned and came at each other head-on, firing, until the German dove and Rick got on his tail and gave him a long burst. 'The Fokker fell off on one wing and dropped to earth', Rickenbacker recalled, but then his engine began running rough, compelling him to land at the 27th's just-established advance airstrip at Verdun. There he found that half of one propeller blade was missing, either from an enemy bullet or through the failure of his own interrupter gear.

In a second sortie that morning 2Lt Alexander V Lyman of the 27th claimed a *Drachen* at 0634 hrs, and although it was not confirmed, his squadronmate Leo Dawson was credited with a Fokker D VII and Ivan Roberts with a two-seater near Romagne.

That afternoon – two days before his leave was due to expire – Frank Luke turned up at the 27th, claiming that there was nothing to do in Paris and soliciting a new partner for a balloon strafe of his own. Roberts was game, and at 1718 hrs they took off, but before they reached the balloon line they were jumped by five Fokkers. Luke claimed one 'out of control' and last saw Roberts fighting over Consenvoye as he struggled his way home with two more Fokkers on his tail, hampered by several gun jams. Roberts was brought down by Ltn Büchner of *Jasta* 13 and captured.

Upon his return, Luke left for the nearest town to commiserate over his latest tragedy without telling anyone, and did not return until the

**Also enjoying success on 26 September was 1Lt Charles M Gravatt of the 95th Aero Squadron, who was credited with destroying a Fokker D VII (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



**The shattered wreckage of SPAD S4505 'Yellow 4' of the 94th Aero Squadron in which 2Lt Alan Nutt was killed at Gercourt on 26 September – one of several 1st Pursuit Group deaths at the hands of Ltn Franz Büchner of *Jasta* 13 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

**Also a victim of Büchner on the 26th was 1Lt Alden B Sherry, who came down between the lines. He would later share in destroying a Halberstadt on 18 October (*George H Williams Collection via Jon Guttman*)**

following day. Roberts later escaped from the Germans, but while making his way back to Allied territory he came down with fever and died near Wasselbonne on 14 October.

Meanwhile, in response to a request from First Army headquarters, Ted Curtis of the 95th volunteered to carry out a reconnaissance mission at low altitude some 30 kilometres into German lines, returning badly shot up by flak and ground fire. Additionally, at 1630 hrs Harold Buckley and Alex McLanahan burned a balloon at Reville and 1Lt Charles N Gravatt claimed a Fokker.

At 1756 hrs, a flight from the 94th ran afoul of *Jasta* 13. Although 2Lt Alan Nutt was credited with a Fokker, he was killed by the ferocious Ltn Büchner, who also shot down 1Lt Alden B Sherry. Force-landing in no man's land, 'Madame' Sherry did not regain friendly lines until the next day.

At 1848 hrs 1Lt Harvey Weir Cook of the 94th destroyed a balloon over Grand Ham. The 1st Pursuit's day ended on a light note when Wilbert White of the 147th attacked what he thought to be a *Drachen* at 1900 hrs, only to see his bullets pass harmlessly through it. During a closer pass he miscalculated his approach and flew right through his target – thereby discovering that his 'balloon' was in fact a puff of black smoke from an exploding flak shell!

Clouds and rain limited American air activity on 27 September until the late afternoon. At 1700 hrs Bill Hoover of the 27th Aero Squadron was credited with a Fokker near Forges, his victim possibly being Ltn Max Näther of *Jasta* 62, who was lightly wounded. During a fight in which Rickenbacker made an unconfirmed Fokker claim, 1Lt Eugene R Scroggie became separated from his flight, but joined another 'party' over Montfaucon involving the 147th Aero Squadron, and he shared in the destruction of a red-nosed, blue-tailed D VII with Wilbert White and 1Lt James P Herron – a second Fokker was also credited to White alone.

At 1814 hrs Harold Buckley, 1Lt Thomas F Butz and 2Lt Granville O Woodard of the 95th downed a Rumpler over Fleville, after which Buckley, with Curtis and 1Lt Henry J Popperfuss, claimed another over Montfaucon at 1825 hrs. Butz was forced to land after the fight, but was unhurt.

The 147th Aero Squadron's 1Lt Charles P Porter with his 'A' Flight SPAD S6306 'White 6'. 'Pip' Porter acquired a sterling reputation as a flight leader, and was credited with his fourth victory on 28 September 1918 (*Jon Guttman*)

The 1st Pursuit started 28 September by eliminating more balloons – one by Rickenbacker over Sivry-sur-Meuse at 0500 hrs and another by Cook at Cléry-le-Petit at 0606 hrs. A short while later, Frank Luke returned to form by taking off without filing a flight plan, crossing the lines at an altitude of 500 ft and destroying a balloon in its nest. He then flew over to celebrate with some French acquaintances at *Groupe de Combat* 12 *'Les Cigognes'*.

At 1030 hrs Vasconcells downed a Rumpler over Forges, but 1Lt Penrose V Stout, who had joined the 27th on 31 August, was invalided out of the unit after being shot in the lung. At midday the 147th's Pip Porter and Frank Ennis were credited with a Fokker, and at 1240 hrs 1Lts Oscar B Myers, Ken Porter and 'Red' Simon downed a Rumpler near Cierges.

That evening, Rickenbacker led a scouting patrol along the railway line from Stenay to Metz, looking for a trainload of Prussian Guard reinforcements rumoured to be en route toward Montfaucon. The 94th men found no such train and returned home, machine-gunning every target that presented itself.

## LUKE'S LAST STAND

The steadily escalating conflict between Alfred Grant and Frank Luke reached its climax on 29 September when the latter returned to the 27th and was told to see the squadron commander immediately. To Grant's query as to his whereabouts, Luke tersely replied *'Cigognes'*, and laid his last combat report on the desk. 'There's another balloon', he said. 'I got it over Bantheville'.

'See here, Luke', Grant said, 'You're a good flier, one hell of a good flier, and you're also the damnedest nuisance that ever stepped on a flying field. But you're not running this outfit! Understand that? And you'll conform as the others do. You're on the ground until further notice. D'ya hear that?'

Soon after Luke left his office, Grant learned from the mechanics that he had taken off again and headed to the auxiliary field at Verdun to refuel. Grant immediately ordered his adjutant to telephone Vasconcells there and have him place Luke under arrest, swearing 'I'm going to recommend him for the Distinguished Service Cross. Then, by God, I'm going to court-martial him!'

In a subsequent confrontation with Hartney, the group commander made a last attempt at compromise between his respected 27th Aero Squadron leader and the talented, but unruly, Luke. Although Luke had made no such request of him, Hartney told Grant that he had authorised him to make a balloon strafe at 1756 hrs that evening. 'That will bring him over the balloon after dark when all the heinies have come home to roost'.

Taking off at 1722 hrs, the Arizona balloon buster flew low over AEF balloon headquarters at Souilly and dropped a message in a cylinder – 'Watch three Hun balloons on Meuse – Luke'. What happened after that has been the subject of numerous claims, including a legal written testimony from the people of the town of Murvaux;

'The undersigned, living in Murvaux, Department of the Meuse, certify to have seen on the 29th of September 1918, toward evening, an American aviator, followed by an *escadrille* of Germans, heading in the direction of Liny, descend suddenly and vertically toward the earth, then straighten out close to the ground and fly in the direction of Briére Farm, where he found a German captive balloon, which he burned. Then he flew toward Milly, where he found another balloon which he burned in spite of incessant fire directed toward his machine. There, he was apparently wounded by a shot from rapid fire cannon. From there he came back over Murvaux, and with his guns he killed six German soldiers on the ground and wounded as many more.

'Following this, he landed and got out of his machine, undoubtedly to quench his thirst at the stream. He had gone 50 yards when, seeing Germans come toward him, still had to the strength to draw his revolver to defend himself. A moment after he fell dead following a serious wound that he had received in the chest.'

Luke's body was later exhumed by the Army's Graves Registration Branch. Evidence now suggests that Luke was mortally wounded before he landed, that he was in a state of shock when he fired at the Germans approaching him and that he probably died from loss of blood, whether return fire struck him or not. His last three victories were confirmed as being from Bz 95 at Côte-Saint-Germain, Bz 64 at Le Briére Ferme and Bz 35 at Milly.

Luke was never court-martialled, but he became the first pilot in the USAS to receive a posthumous Medal of Honor, as well as the DSC with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Italian *Croce de Guerra* and, on 9 November 1918, a belated promotion to first lieutenant.

In addition to the spectacular finale of Luke's career, three SPADs of the 95th went after a *Drachen* near Dun-sur-Meuse. In a letter home Denny Holden wrote of what transpired;

'I was leading Woodard and a new man. We reached the lines at dusk – the new man left with motor trouble and Woody and I went over just above the clouds. We hunted for perhaps half-an-hour before I spotted two almost on the ground. Somehow I had a hunch everything wasn't all right – they weren't shooting at us. We circled for sometime – luckily! Four German aeroplanes appeared between us and our lines. It was another trap. I climbed into the scattered clouds, and that was the last time I saw Woody. Then they opened the hottest Archy fire I ever went through. I waited for developments – it was almost dark. I was at 2500 metres, and it was too dark to see the balloons till one burst in flames. Woody must have gotten it. I don't know if he had seen the German aeroplanes coming, for he never came home. I won't forget him in a hurry. He was one of the most modest, all around good fellows I have met here.

'It was so dark by this time I figured the Huns must have gone. The gunners I don't think saw me till I had started shooting – the balloon was only 100 metres up. I waited as patiently as I could till I was very close, then fired – my guns jammed! They were shooting machine guns and "flaming onions". I was so mad it didn't phase me – I just got out the hammer and started fixing the guns. I got the guns fixed, and was turning to fire again when up she went. Can you picture that great sausage wrapped in flames in the dead of night? I was lucky enough to get home and land without smashing by means of lights on the ground.'

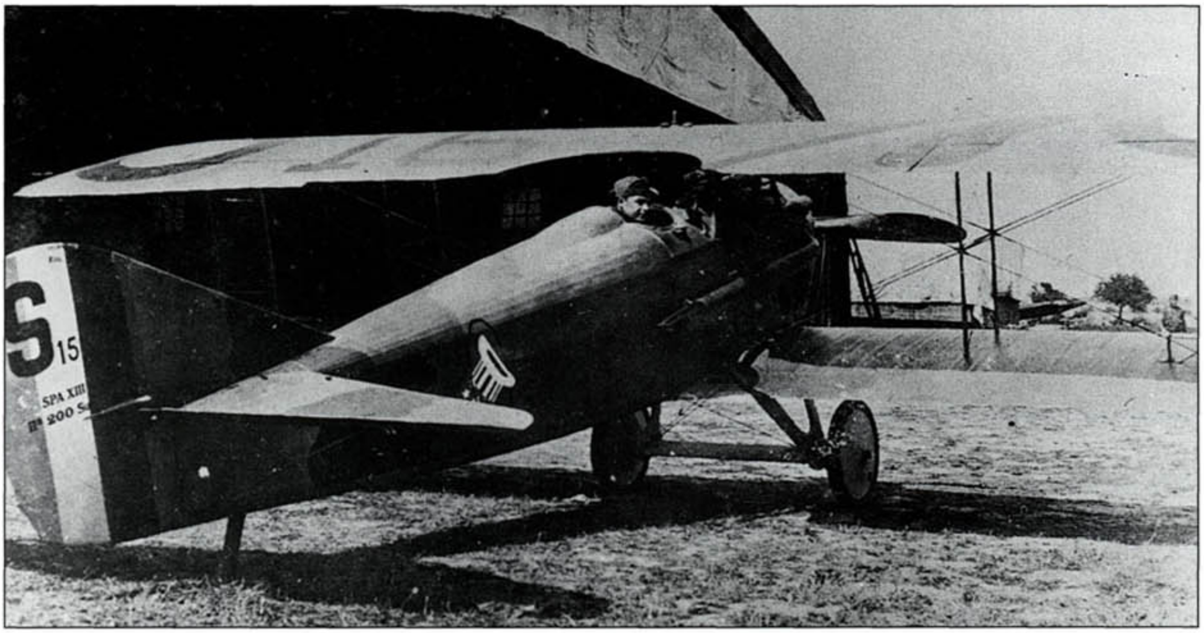
Both Holden and Woodard were credited with the balloons destroyed at 1855 hrs, but Woodard was subsequently brought down by Ltn Rudolf Rienau of *Jasta* 19 and taken prisoner.

One more honour for the 1st Pursuit that day was earned by Reed Chambers and 2Lt Samuel Kaye Jr of the 94th near Cunel at 1720 hrs, as described in Chambers' DSC citation;

'While on a mission, Lt Chambers, accompanied by another machine piloted by Lt Samuel Kaye Jnr, encountered a formation of six enemy machines (Fokker type) at an altitude of 3000 ft. Despite numerical superiority of the enemy, Lt Chambers and Lt Kaye immediately attacked and succeeded in destroying one and forced the remaining five to retreat to their own lines.'

Frank Luke's two-week balloon-busting spree proved to be a tough act for the 27th Aero Squadron to follow. On 1 October Vasconcells

**2Lt Sammy Kaye poses in the cockpit of SPAD S15130 'Yellow 16'. This photograph shows the placement of the number and white and red squadron band on the upper wing. The first of Kaye's four victories was shared with Reed Chambers on 29 September in an action that earned the latter the DFC (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



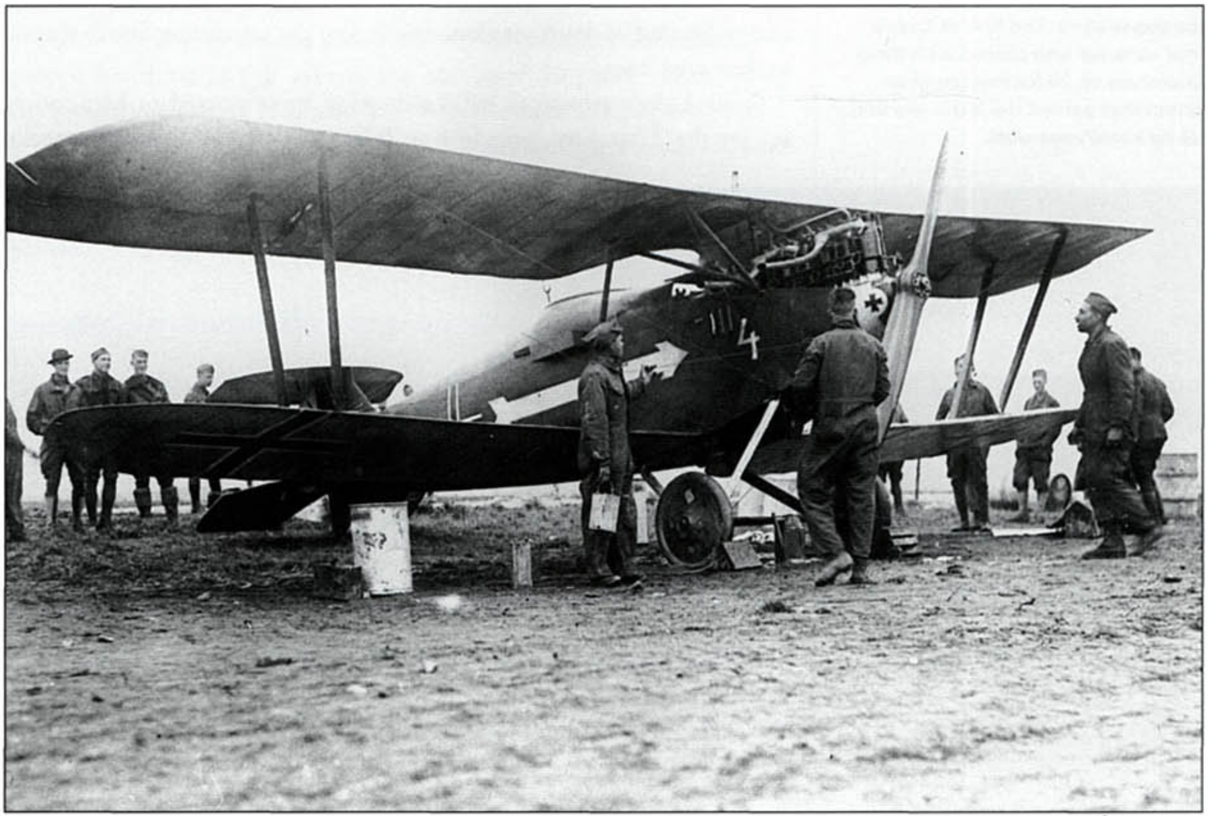
reported an indecisive fight with a Fokker at 1210 hrs. An anti-balloon sortie launched at 1400 hrs apparently ran afoul of *Jasta* 15, because Ltn Josef Veltjens, Ltn von Hantelmann and Vzfw Gustav Klaudat claimed SPADs southeast of Buzancy at 1640 hrs German time. The actual results were 1Lt William F Stewart crashing at Issoncourt and 1Lt Samuel H Colton being forced down at Dombasle – both pilots were unhurt and rejoined the squadron.

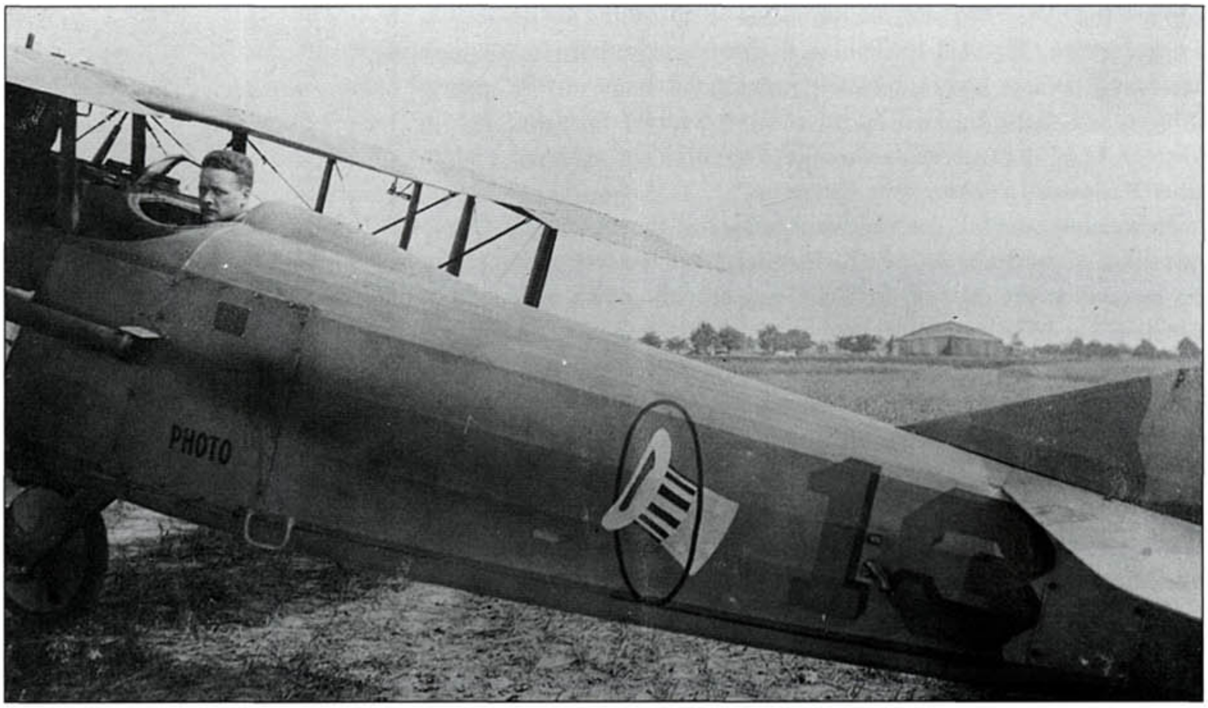
The 1st Pursuit's only success of the day came from Rickenbacker, who, during an afternoon sortie, spotted a *Drachen* nest at Puzieux at 1930 hrs. 'It was too easy a job to be called a victory', he wrote, 'for I merely poked down my nose, fired a hundred rounds or so and the job was done'. The enemy was too surprised to shoot back, but he did come under American anti-aircraft fire crossing the lines, although Rick remarked, 'Their aim was so bad that I did not feel indignant at their overzealousness'.

On 2 October Rickenbacker was accompanying Chambers' flight when he spotted a Hannover flying a low altitude observation sortie over Montfaucon. The observer was so intent on his work that Rick disabled him with his first volley before either German suspected his presence. At that point his guns jammed, but by then Chambers had arrived, and he shot at the pilot and they saw the aeroplane go down.

Ten minutes after sharing in the Hannover's demise Rickenbacker, having cleared his jammed guns, had resumed patrolling when eight Fokkers emerged from a cloud and he found himself fighting for survival until Chambers' flight again came to the rescue. Almost simultaneously Rick and Chambers each claimed a Fokker near Vilosnes behind Allied lines, although German records do not acknowledge any pilots lost there that day.

**Recovered three days after being brought down by Rickenbacker and Chambers on 2 October, Hannover CL IIIa 3982/18, late of *Schlacht-staffel* 5, attracts curiosity at Rembercourt (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**





**1Lt Thorne C Taylor with SPAD S15021 'Yellow 13'. After serving steadily since the 94th Aero Squadron's inception, Taylor shared in the destruction of a German balloon on 3 October 1918 (*Jack Eder via Jon Guttman*)**

At 1815 hrs a Halberstadt had the misfortune to meet elements of two squadrons over Bois de Ville, its fall being credited to 1Lts Coolidge and Edward G Garnsey of the 94th and Arthur Jones and Frank Simonds of the 147th.

The US advance on Montfaucon continued on 3 October, hindered by hilly, thickly forested terrain in which the Germans' stubborn defence was aided by observation balloons near Doulcon. The 94th was ordered to eliminate the latter that afternoon, and at 1500 hrs 1Lt Thorne Taylor led eight SPADs, joined by eight each from the 27th, 95th and 147th Aero Squadrons. 'It was a new daylight dodge we would try to put over the Germans before they suspected the object of our mission', Rickenbacker explained, in which 1Lts Cook, Coolidge and Charles I Crocker 'would make a sudden dash down at the balloon, one behind the other'.

Things did not go entirely as planned. After leaving formation, Coolidge and Crocker began their runs at the *Drachen* before their escorts were in position to cover them. Rickenbacker duly saw six Fokkers moving to intercept them, engaged by a lone SPAD which they shot down. More Fokkers arrived and a general melée broke out, during which Cook managed to burn a balloon at Grandpré at 1615 hrs. At the same time, 1Lts Taylor, Palmer and Wiley S Sparks of the 94th destroyed a second *Drachen* at Grandpré. Coolidge roasted a third 'sausage' at Cléry-le-Grand at 1636 hrs, and while climbing away he shot down an attacking Fokker three minutes later.

Meanwhile, Rickenbacker engaged a lone Fokker, sent it down out of control and saw it crash at 1640 hrs. As he headed home, he spotted Ted Curtis of the 95th attacking an LVG over Dannevoux, and joined the chase at 1707 hrs just as Curtis was disengaging with jammed guns. 'The Hun pilot was endeavouring to make his escape as I reached him from one side and a SPAD that I later recognised as belonging to Ham Coolidge came in on the other', wrote Rick, who closed to 100 yards before firing, and saw the LVG's fuel tank catch fire, 'the wind fanning the flames into a fiery furnace'. That kill, credited to all three Americans involved, made an ace of Coolidge, and most closely matches the deaths of Uffz Ludwig Pflüger and Gefr August Thäder of *Schlachtstaffel (Schlasta)* 26b at Cierges. At 1715 hrs Jerry Vasconcells of the 27th also achieved acedom when he downed a Fokker over Aprémont.

Although successful, the afternoon foray cost the 1st Pursuit Group two pilots. Gene Scroggie, who Rickenbacker had last seen taking on the six Fokkers at the start of the fight, was brought down northwest of Aincreville at 1630 hrs and credited to Ltn Hermann Becker, CO of *Jasta* 12. Walter Avery of the 95th, shot down near Limey and credited to *Jasta* 19's commander, Ltn Oliver von Beaulieu-Marconnay, later described his experiences during this sortie;

'One morning Rick called for volunteers to go out and get some German balloons, and I went out with others of the squadron. The balloons were above the clouds, and we got what we went after. Then I got too far below the clouds. A battle had developed in which 30 German and about 20 Allied aeroplanes were taking part. Five Fokkers started after me. One of them shot at me and broke my windshield. The flying glass blinded me and I almost lost control. Another German fired a shot into my engine and it went dead. Then I fell about 1200 ft and landed in the midst of a German barracks. That is how I broke my jaw.'

'At the cessation of hostilities both of these boys were turned back to us by Germany', Rickenbacker wrote. 'Scroggie had been shot through the foot, but was able to come back to his squadron. Poor Avery had received a disfiguring wound in the face which had been neglected by the German surgeons'. Avery, who underwent painful surgery for his poorly tended broken jaw upon his return to the Americans in December 1918, was later given credit for destroying the balloon before he was shot down. Awarded the *Croix de Guerre* with Star and Palm, as well as the DSC, he continued a varied career in aviation that included working with Rickenbacker at Eastern Air Lines before retiring in 1955.

Sometime after Avery's death on 1 May 1978, his daughter Bette Avery Applegate found the fabric of Karl Menckhoff's Fokker in a trunk in his home. Later she learned that Menckhoff's son resided in the District of Columbia. Gerhard Menckhoff, who was 11 when his father died, had never heard about his wartime career, and was surprised when he was invited to meet Mrs Applegate at a seminar of the League of World War I Aviation Historians in Roslyn, Virginia, on 11 May 2007. There, 89 years after their fathers had fought, Mrs Applegate presented the relic to Menckhoff, stating, 'I just feel it should go back to the family from which it came'.

Jim Knowles of the 95th scored the group's only victory on 4 October – a Rumpler near Villers-Doullencourt at 0650 hrs. The next day saw more action when a patrol from the 27th ran into 11 Fokkers over Montfaucon, with 1Lts Colton, William S McKinnon, Henry W Nicholson and Roger W Rowland reporting inconclusive combats. McKinnon was wounded, but in spite of intense pain, he brought his aeroplane back, made an excellent landing and was taken to hospital. 1Lt Leslie B Cooper crashed in a shell hole near Bethelainville that same day, but emerged unhurt. Patrols from the 94th encountered opposition at least twice that afternoon, 1Lt John N Jeffers downing a Fokker near Romagne at 1550 hrs and Kaye claiming another in flames near Bantheville at 1710 hrs.

It was also on 5 October that Rickenbacker and Chambers learned that the Hannover they had fought three days earlier had come down intact in Allied lines at Véry, southwest of Montfaucon. They promptly drove to the front to examine it.

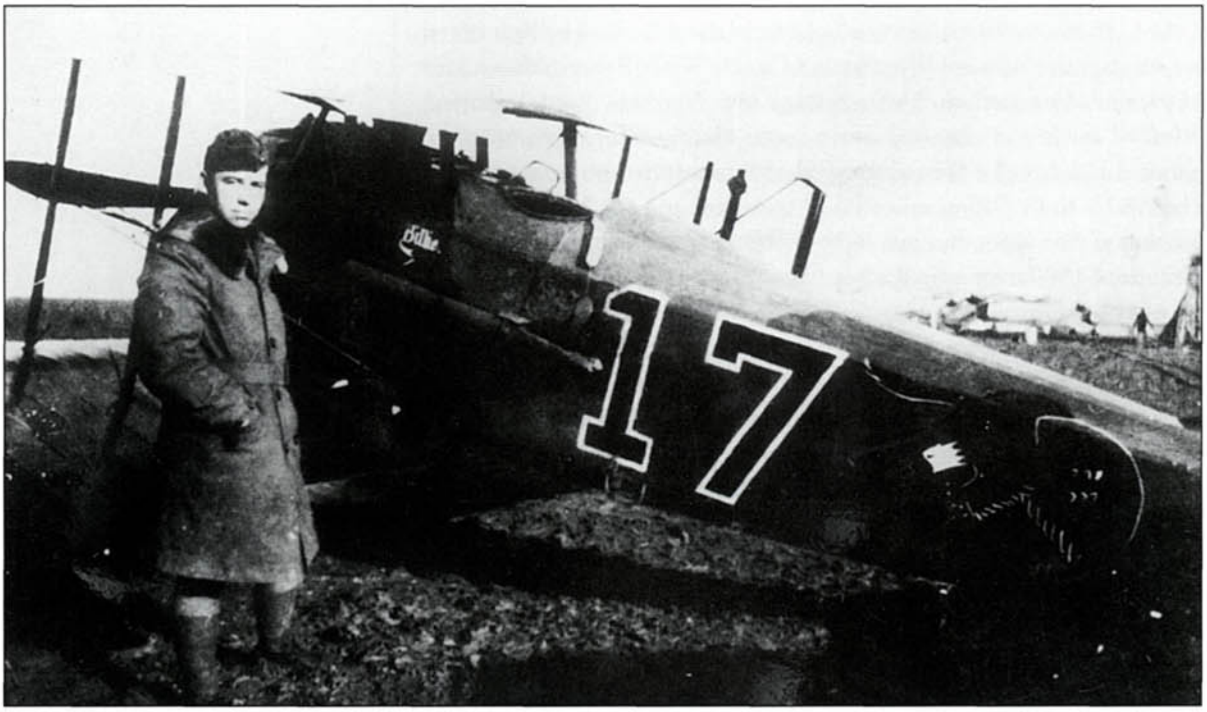
'It was indeed in remarkably good condition', Rickenbacker wrote. 'It had glided down under the control of the pilot and made a fairly good landing, considering the rough nature of the ground. The nose had gone over at the last moment and the machine had struck its propeller on the ground, breaking it. The tail stood erect in the air, resting against the upper half of a German telephone pole. A few ribs in the wings had been broken, but these could easily be repaired. Our mechanics with their truck and trailer had already arrived at the spot and were ready to take down the wings and load our prize onto their conveyance.

'A newly dug grave a few yards away indicated the last resting place of the observer that my bullets had killed in air. The pilot had been sent back to one of our hospitals for treatment. A bullet had pierced his face, shattering his jaw.'

Hannover CL IIIa 2392 late of *Schlachststaffel* 5 was duly recovered, evaluated and photographed with the men who brought it down. The pilot had been Vzfw Paul Holtmann, while observer Vzfw Fritz Hankner had died of his wounds.

## A NEW SQUADRON ARRIVES

Jerry Vasconcells and Donald Hudson of the 27th scored their sixth victories on 6 October when they and Ernest Hewitt downed a Fokker D VII over Cuissy. Ham Coolidge of the 94th burned a balloon at St Juvin at 1059 hrs. The 147th also conducted anti-balloon sorties throughout the day, during which Bill Brotherton riddled one before his guns



**1Lt Ernest W Hewitt with his SPAD XIII, christened *Billie*. One of the 27th Aero Sqn's replacements of 25 July 1918, Hewitt finally scored a shared victory on 6 October in concert with Capt Vasconcells and 1Lt Hudson (*Jon Guttman*)**

jammed. Frustrated, but not to be denied, Brotherton returned to the same *Drachen* later that day and succeeded in setting it ablaze.

When a formation of German fighters tried to retaliate against the American balloon line, Frank Simonds and Pip Porter of the 147th intercepted them and harassed them until they withdrew. The day ended with the group log noting that the Hannover brought down by Rickenbacker and Chambers had been 'torn up by irresponsible persons seeking souvenirs'. Photographs taken at later dates, however, suggest that it was restored to flyable status.

Heavy rains limited operations on 7 October, but that morning a new unit attached itself to the 1st Pursuit Group. Commanded by 1Lt Seth Low, the 185th Aero Squadron was a specialised nightfighter outfit equipped with Boulton and Paul-built Sopwith F 1 Camels powered by 160 hp Gnome monosoupape engines.

The weather improved enough for extensive operations to resume on 9 October. The 27th had the worst of a fight with *Jasta* 15 over Montfaucon at 1615 hrs, with Ltns von Hantelmann and Hugo Schäfer being credited with SPADs. In this case, however, both of their victims, 1Lt Hudson and 2Lt Hollis A Cross, came down in Allied lines and were hospitalised, wounded but alive.

At 1630 hrs Knowles of the 95th engaged three Fokkers attacking an American balloon near Montfaucon, and in a five-minute melée claimed one in flames and drove off the others. The action earned him his fourth confirmed victory, and the DSC.

2Lt John DeWitt, who had flown SE 5as in No 32 Sqn RAF before joining the 94th on 26 September, was hit by ground fire but glided in over the lines and crashed in a shell hole. A balloon-hunting party from the 147th failed to find any game, so its pilots emptied their guns into German artillery positions on their way back. A final evening flight by Rickenbacker bore fruit, however, when he circled around to surprise a *Ballonzug* at Dun-sur-Meuse and burned its *Drachen* at 1752 hrs.

At 1145 hrs on 10 October, a flight from the 147th led by Ken Porter set out to patrol between Brieulles and Cunel. 'While flying in the vicinity of Fleville, I noticed an Archie barrage over Verdun', Porter reported. 'Headed for it and observed a two-seater Hannover at 4000 metres at about 1215 hrs. Lt White engaged the two-seater in combat and I observed it to be falling in a vertical nose dive at 1225 hrs northeast of Verdun at Anzannes, but lost sight of falling machine in the haze. At an altitude of 1500 metres fired a burst from gun at very long range.

'After fight I flew west at an altitude of 2500 metres, and at 1235 hrs I saw an enemy balloon shot down in flames in vicinity of Sassey-sur-Meuse. The balloon seemed to be at an altitude of 1800 metres. At 1250 hrs I saw seven Fokkers with white noses and white tails flying at 800 metres over Cunel. Two of the Fokkers dove to an altitude of 100 metres, strafing the troops on the road which runs west through Bois du Fays. I dove on the two Fokkers from the front, firing both guns. The other five jumped me and I had to beat it.'

White, Porter and Myers shared credit for the Hannover, and Porter was also credited with one of the Fokkers he'd engaged over Cunel. Meissner, O'Neill and 1Lt George G Waters shared in another Fokker, this being the sixth victory for the first two, and newcomer Waters' first.

Bill Brotherton attacked a Rumpler but was driven off by five escorting Fokkers, although he was credited with shooting down one of the latter near Dun-sur-Meuse for his third victory.

Later that day 1Lts Byron Bilderback and William Stewart of the 27th flew a special mission escorting a Breguet 14A2, only to run afoul of Ltn Friedrich Noltenius of *Jasta* 6, who was flying a lone anti-balloon sortie when he spotted them near Fontaine at 1500 hrs. 'I let them fly deeper into our territory and then attacked one of the SPADs', he wrote. 'The other one did nothing about it. I forced him down to approximately 1000 metres when the other finally came to the rescue of his pal. I permitted him to come close, but not close enough for firing, then turned toward him and placed myself below and behind him. I fired and he spun and immediately broke up. Then I rushed for the other one, but he bolted so fast that I was unable to hold him'.

Noltenius was credited with the second SPAD for his 15th victory, but in fact Bilderback made a forced landing at the 27th's advance field at Verdun, while Stewart crash-landed near Vadelaincourt. Both SPADs were written off, but neither pilot was injured.

At 1515 hrs Gen Mitchell despatched the 27th, 94th and 147th Aero Squadrons to eliminate two replacement balloons reported at Dun-sur-Meuse and Aincreville. Rickenbacker selected Chambers and Coolidge to attack the gasbags at 1550 hrs while the rest of the group covered them. At 1540 hrs Rick noticed 'a group of 11 Fokkers flying in beautiful formation, having evidently just risen from the aerodrome at Stenay', approaching from the west to attack the 147th's contingent, which was a mile from the rest of the group. From the opposite direction, eight more Fokkers were approaching from Metz.

Rickenbacker led the 94th against the Germans, who passed under him, allowing him to dive on the trailing Fokker and set its fuel tank on fire. 'I was almost equally gratified the next second to see the German pilot level off his blazing machine and, with a sudden leap overboard into space, let the Fokker slide safely away without him', Rick wrote. 'Attached to his back and sides was a rope which immediately pulled a dainty parachute from the bottom of his seat. The umbrella opened within a 50-ft drop and settled him gradually to earth within his own lines'.

Meanwhile, the 147th was heavily engaged, and both its commander, Meissner, and Rickenbacker of the 94th witnessed the death of Wilbert White, who was leading 'C' Flight in his second combat sortie of the day. In a letter to White's wife, Meissner described what he saw;

'The designated balloon wasn't up, so Brotherton attacked one near it, on the ground. We saw him dive, and for a moment lost him in the heavy haze. Just then five strange aeroplanes appeared over us, and we saw they were Fokkers (the German equivalent of our SPADs) as their leader dove on a new pilot in our formation of three.

'"Whitey", leading, instantly turned in his tracks to drive the Hun off and save the new pilot, naturally excited and apt to lose his head when he heard bullets crack around. The Fokker kept diving and "Whitey" raced back at him shooting. But the Hun never turned, and it was not in your husband's creed to turn first in a head-on attack like that. I was racing in to help, still too far away to shoot, and watched the inevitable happen as they met and fell out of control from an altitude of 500 metres.'

Who Said Rats!

**The 147th's Wilbert White (left) and 2Lt Louis C 'Red' Simon stand alongside the former's Nieuport N6284 'Black 13' in July 1918. White was killed in a mid-air collision with his eighth victory on 10 October 1918 (*Alan Roesler*)**

'For sheer nerve and bravery I believe this heroic feat has never been surpassed', Rickenbacker remarked, but moments later he saw another tragedy unfold. 'As I came about and headed for the mix-up, I glanced below at Dun and was amazed to see one of our SPADs diving upon the nested balloon through a hurricane of flaming projectiles. A "flaming onion" had pierced his wings and they were now ablaze. To add to his predicament, a Hun machine was behind his tail, firing as he dived. I diverted my course and started down to his rescue, but it was too late. The fire in his wing was fanned by the wind, and it made such progress that he was compelled to land in German territory, not far from the site of the balloon'.

Rickenbacker had witnessed the death of Bill Brotherton of the 147th. At that point, he saw another SPAD under attack, and recognised its pilot as his former squadronmate, Jimmy Meissner, 'smiling and good-natured as ever, with two ugly brutes on his tail trying their best to execute him. I quickly tacked onto the procession, setting my sights on the rear machine and letting go a long burst as I came within range', Rick continued. 'The Hun fell off and dropped out of control and the other Fokkers immediately pulling away and diving steeply for home, and safety'.

Meissner, who wrote to his mother about the four Germans being on his tail, and told her about their 'poor shooting', noted;

'As we got back to our lines, Rickenbacker and some others saw the chase and dove on the Fokkers, getting three of them, so I was a good decoy, as I've been before. But two of our best and oldest men are gone. White, who was married and had two children, was to have received orders home in a few days, and he knew it. But he never hesitated when he saw his duty cut out, which makes his act all the more heroic.'

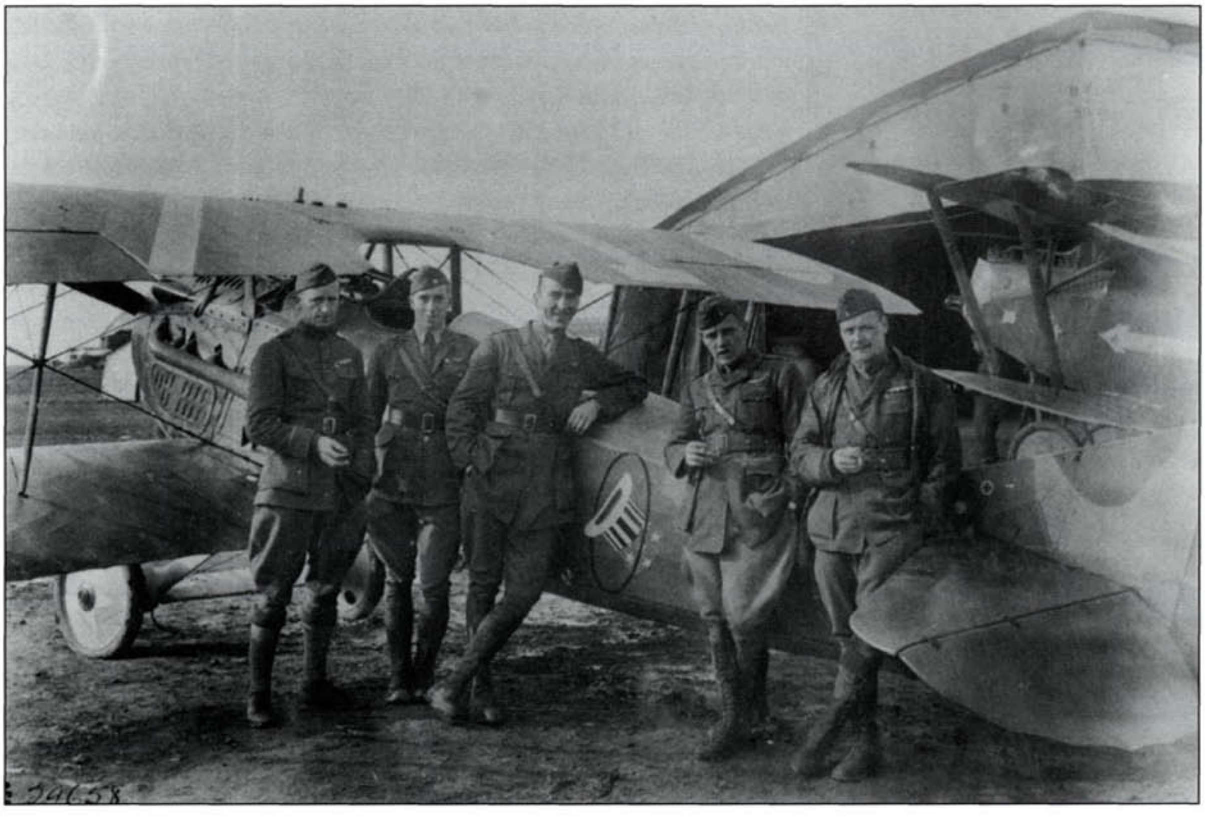
Rickenbacker was credited with two victories, bringing his total to 20. A third Fokker was awarded to Chambers and a fourth was shared by

Coolidge and Palmer. White was posthumously credited with the Fokker he had rammed as his eighth victory, and was also recommended for the Medal of Honor, but only received an Oak Leaf to his DFC. Neither Chambers nor Coolidge, however, got at the balloons that had been the mission's primary targets.

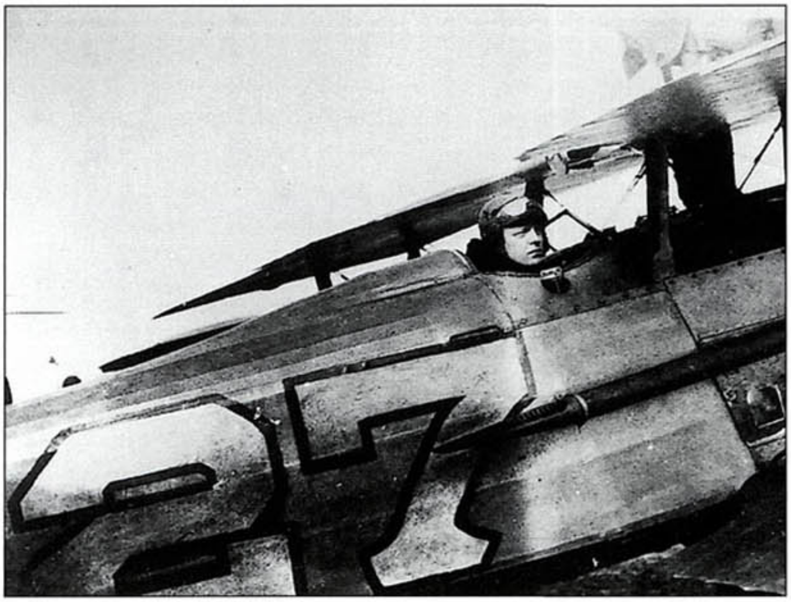
'In retrospect', Rickenbacker wrote, 'I was never in favour of attacking observation balloons in full daylight, and this day's experiences – the aroused suspicions of the observers, the pulling down of the balloon as strong aeroplane assistance at the same time arrived, and the fate of Lt Brotherton, who tried unsuccessfully to dive through the defensive barrage – is a fair illustration of the difficulties attending such daylight strafings. Dawn or dusk is the ideal time for surprising the *Drachen*'.

For all the claims made over them, the Germans involved in the fight recorded only one Fokker destroyed – that of Ltn d R Wilhelm Kohlbach of *Jasta* 10, who parachuted from his aeroplane after colliding with White's SPAD, and who was subsequently credited with it as his fifth victory. Rickenbacker, writing of the air battle many years after the war, may have confused things to make Kohlbach his own parachuting victim. *Jasta* 10 also credited a SPAD (probably Brotherton) near Fontaine to Ltn Justus Grassmann, and another over Dannevoux to Ltn d R Aloys Heldmann, the latter's 'victim' probably being Meissner, in spite of his making it home.

Poor weather set in for the next two days, but during a break on the 12th Ken Porter and Frank Simonds of the 147th became aces when they and Abe Abernethy shared in downing a Hannover over Romagne at 0945 hrs. That day also saw Jimmy Meissner, Ham Coolidge, 'Ack' Grant and Seth Low promoted to the rank of captain.



**'The Gimper Crowd'. Survivors of the 94th's original roster reunite for a photo alongside Rickenbacker's SPAD on 18 October – note Rickenbacker's Hannover in the background. These pilots are, from left to right, 1Lt Joseph K Eastman, Jimmy Meissner (now commanding the 147th), Rickenbacker, Chambers and Thorne Taylor (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



**2Lt Cleveland McDermott shared in the 147th Aero Squadron's first two victories on 2 July 1918, and then scored another double on his own before being wounded – possibly by Ltn Max Näther of *Jasta* 62 – and being invalided to hospital on 18 October (*Alan Roesler*)**

At 1607 hrs on the 13th Coolidge burned a balloon at Andevanne for his eighth success. On the 14th, Maj David Peterson was ordered stateside to serve as an instructor. Capt John Mitchell replaced him as CO of the 95th Aero Squadron and 1Lt Holden took over Mitchell's old flight. In the course of his service in the 94th and 95th, Peterson had added six victories to the first he had scored while in SPA124, but he was tragically killed in an aircraft accident on 16 March 1919.

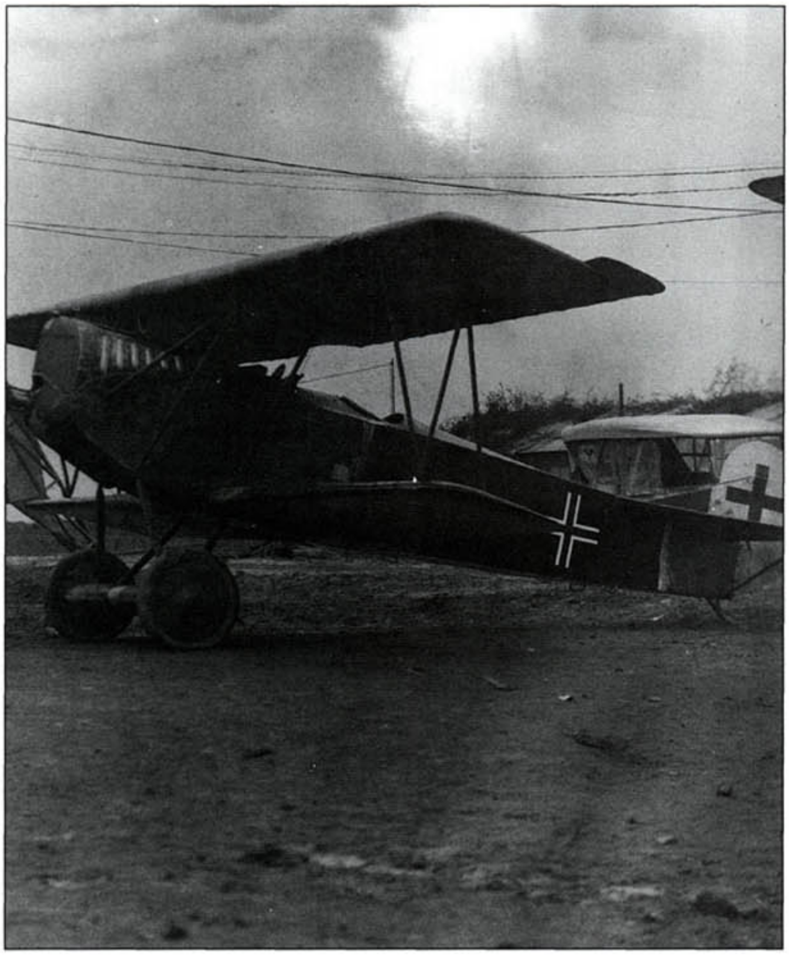
The 1st Pursuit Group's next victory did not come until 18 October, when 2Lt Cleveland 'Deuce' McDermott of the 147th was credited with two Fokkers over Brieulles-sur-Bar, although he was himself brought down wounded – probably by Ltn Max Näther of *Jasta* 62, who was credited with a SPAD near Gercourt at 1425 hrs – and subsequently hospitalised.

At 1530 hrs 1Lt Albert J Weatherhead Jnr of the 95th drove down a Fokker near Exermont, which probably resulted in Lt d R Gustav Böhren of *Jasta* 10 being taken prisoner at nearby Sommerance. Sumner Sewall came to the aid of a Salmson returning from a reconnaissance mission with eight Fokkers in pursuit, claiming a 'probable' and allowing the two-seater to get home unharmed.

That situation was reversed at 1535 hrs when Weir Cook, Sammy Kaye and 'Madame' Sherry of the 94th caught a Halberstadt flying over Exermont and shot it down near Sommerance. The pilot, Gfr Alwin Grothe of *Schlasta* 20, was killed and his observer, Uffz Robert Rosenkrantz, taken prisoner.

At 1920 hrs Capt Low left Rembercourt to conduct the 185th Aero Squadron's first operational night patrol. The unit now had 17 Camels, with eight on the field, but its pilots had no nocturnal flying experience – Holt wing flares, parachute flares or instrument lights were meant to aid them. The aerodrome had yet to install landing lights or a beacon, and no arrangements had been made to communicate and coordinate the pilots' efforts with US Army searchlight crews and anti-aircraft units.

Encountering thick cloud over Verdun, Low returned after only 20 minutes – just as well, given the fact that the gas-guzzling Gnome that

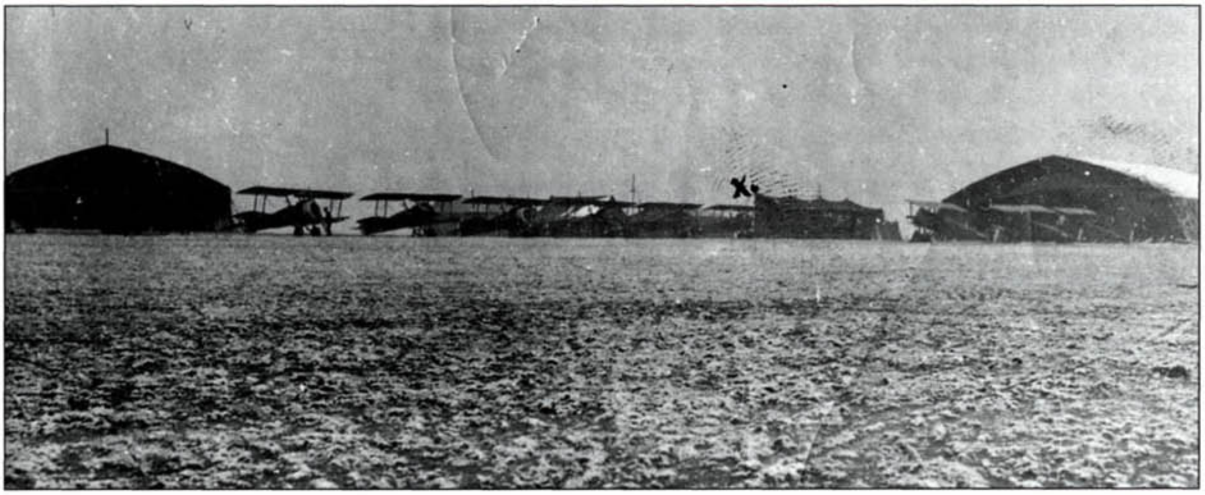


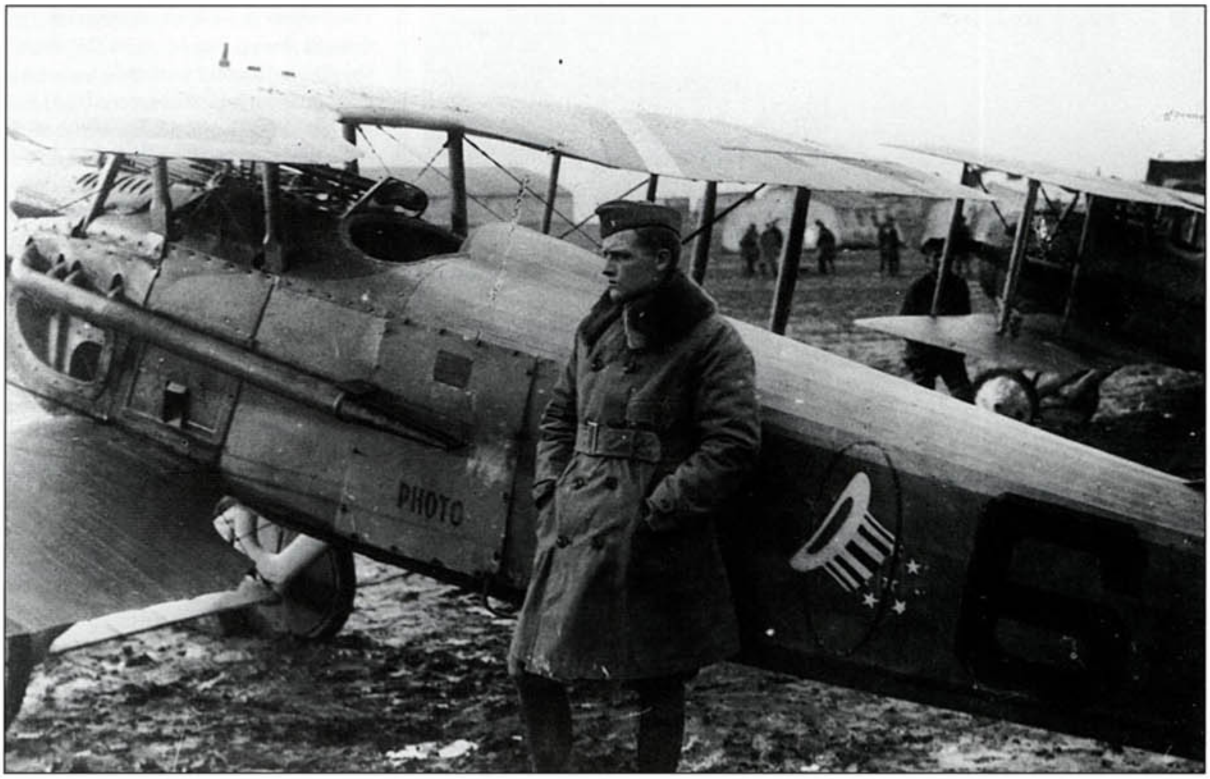
**The Fokker D VII that fell into 1st Pursuit Group hands on 18 October, the fighter having probably been driven down near Exermont by 1Lt Albert J Weatherhead Jnr of the 95th Aero Sqn. *Jasta* 10 recorded Lt d R Gustav Böhren being brought down and captured at nearby Sommerance that same day (*National Archives via Jon Guttman*)**

powered his Camel allowed him roughly half the flight time of other rotary engines. 1Lt Doyen P Wardell, a veteran transferred in from the 103rd Aero Squadron to command 'B' Flight, took off at 1945 hrs, but poor visibility forced him to return five minutes later. Aside from formal alerts, 1Lts Elihu H Kelton, Arthur T Johnson and George W Ewing took Camels up for 20-minute familiarisation flights.

The 22nd dawned with some morning balloon busting, Cook of the 94th burning a *Drachen* at Tailly at 0555 hrs, while 1Lt Sidney W

**Sopwith Camels of the 185th Aero Squadron line up at Rembercourt. The unit commenced operations on the night of 18 October 1918 (*Alan Toelle*)**





**1Lt Reed Chambers stands beside Blériot-built SPAD S15225 'Yellow 6', which he used to score his last two victories and earn a third Oak Leaf Cluster to his DSC on 22 October 1918 (*Jon Guttman*)**

White of the 27th destroyed another at Bantheville, as well as a Fokker that tried to interfere, although on the return flight 1Lt Bilderback crashed near Avecourt.

During yet another duel between the 94th and *Jasta* 15 over Brieulles-sur-Meuse that afternoon 1Lt Raymond J Saunders was killed, a minute after which Rickenbacker claimed to have seen Jeffers shoot down his killer, although the German, von Hantelmann, survived. Rickenbacker himself claimed a Fokker over Cléry-le-Petit ten minutes later, and at 1620 hrs Ted Curtis of the 95th became an ace by downing a Fokker between Marcq and Brieulles.

The 94th's recently-promoted Capt Reed Chambers ambushed five Fokkers over Vilosnes at 1630 hrs, claiming the trailing two in as many minutes before the remaining three Germans drove him down in Allied lines, his tally now at seven. Upon returning to Rembercourt, however, Chambers was stricken with an intense pain that proved to be appendicitis, and he was rushed to hospital to have his appendix removed.

The 185th had been flying alerts the past few nights without encountering any enemy raiders. After returning from his patrol on the night of 22 October, however, 1Lt Philip Benson decided to try something different. 'I found a bomb rack lying around', he told his parents in a letter he wrote the next day, 'so I asked the Captain if he would mind if I carry a couple of bombs over to the Germans after my regular patrol. The Captain said "Splendid!"' Benson rigged two 24-lb bombs under his Camel, and after taking off at 2221 hrs flew over the Verdun area, then headed north.

'No sooner had I crossed the lines and everything under the sun opened up on me and the air was full of the damnedest flashes, searchlights and tracer bullets', Benson wrote. 'They stood very little chance of hitting me though, as my aeroplane was about the smallest and nearly the fastest made, so I didn't worry much. Just as I thought I was alright, a searchlight came too close for comfort and I had to climb up into some clouds that were only about 500 ft above me. They were so thick and dense that I couldn't see my lighted instruments, and I lost all control of the ship. She finally got into a spin, but when I fell out of the clouds I was alright.

'My compass soon quieted down, and I steered due north for about ten minutes so I could be sure that I was in German-held territory. In the meantime I had lost all landmarks, so I had to bomb the first good thing I saw. Pretty soon a fair sized town loomed up, so I dropped down to 3000 ft and let them go. I could see some objects on the road, so I dropped still lower and let go with my machine guns until my ammunition was gone and then I climbed up high and headed south. Pretty soon Archie got busy again, and a few minutes later our home searchlight loomed up and I can tell you it was a wonderful sight to me.'

Benson believed he had attacked Bouligny. Other patrols followed, including one at 0055 hrs in which Kelton tried to attack the German aerodrome at Damvillers, but could not locate it and probably dropped his bombs on Longuyon. He then fired 20 rounds at a train coming from Spincourt until his guns jammed.

An unofficial participant in the 185th's activities that night was its group commander, Lt Col Hartney, who climbed to 10,000 ft and tried to extend his time by alternately blipping his engine on and off. Sighting several searchlights converging over Verdun, he climbed to 12,000 ft, and as he went to investigate he spotted blue exhaust flames.

Giving full throttle for the next five minutes, he suddenly found himself almost colliding with a Gotha G V. Hartney cut the throttle, descended several thousand feet, then climbed under the bomber and fired a long burst. Suddenly his engine stalled, and by the time he got it running again he had dropped to 8000 ft. Hartney found a railway line that, along with a vertical searchlight beam for reference, guided him back to Rembercourt with his reserve tank nearly dry. Hartney was never credited with a victory, nor did he press for it, but nine days after the Armistice the Americans found an abandoned Gotha in some woods south of Verdun, riddled from below by machine gun fire.

The 27th Aero Squadron started 23 October off by eliminating more 'eyes in the sky', as Capt Grant shot the right wing off a Rumpler over Bantheville at 0845 hrs and 1Lts Donaldson, Colton and Stewart teamed up to down a Halberstadt over Grandpré at 0910 hrs. At 1630 hrs Rickenbacker shot down a Fokker over Petit-le-Grand. His victim was probably Vzfw Gustav Klaudat of *Jasta* 15, an East Prussian with six victories whose wartime career was curtailed with a bullet through the bone in his left upper arm.

Meanwhile, Curtis, Weatherhead and Holden of the 95th were on their way to carry out a request for the elimination of three German balloons that had been directing artillery fire on American troops from Montigny. Over Baulny, Holden recounted, 'We three were flying over one of our balloons when I saw the two observers jump out. This meant something was attacking it. In another instant I saw the German set it on fire. I dived at him firing from long range. It was a stern chase and he got away. The nerve of that Hun – I certainly admire him – right under our noses'.

The two 2nd Balloon Company observers parachuted down unhurt. Curiously, Holden and Curtis were later officially credited with downing the Fokker over St Juvin at 1630 hrs, giving Curtis his sixth, and final, victory. The German who had gained Holden's grudging admiration was Ltn Noltenius, now with *Jasta* 11, who having already downed a balloon and a SPAD (in the latter case wounding Sgt Edwin B Fairchild, an LFC pilot of SPA159), lived to recount his fourth sortie – and third victory – of the day;

'Two observers jumped. I was already discovered while still diving, and had to fly my approach through flak bursts. The balloon caught fire in five spots. It had barely caught fire when I saw four SPADs rushing me. I applied full throttle and escaped at the double-double quick. The SPADs did not react with sufficient determination and shot at me from behind at very long range, so I escaped unscathed.'

Waiting until it got darker, Holden pressed on toward the German balloon line and attacked at 1705 hrs. 'I picked the end one, which proved to be a fake with no basket', he wrote. 'It didn't burn, and both my guns jammed. I fixed them on the way to the next one – and oh, the barrage they put up at the time looked like Fourth of July, with not many "archies" but millions of flaming onions and incendiary bullets. The second one the observers jumped from, but that didn't burn either and the guns jammed again. The third one I attacked twice. They had pulled them all down – this one was about 50 metres up – and again the guns jammed, but as I turned away two little red holes like blood shot eyes were burning on its side. Slowly the fire spread, then up she went.'

Holden's persistence accomplished his mission, avenged the 2nd Balloon Company's loss and later earned him the DSC.

The 185th Aero Squadron had some near-encounters with German bombers that night but failed to make any decisive contacts.

## MIXED FORTUNES

The next two days saw mixed fortunes for the 1st Pursuit Group. The only decisive combat on 26 October resulted in the loss of 2Lt Meredith L Dowd, a former LFC member in the 147th who was killed over Dannevoux at 1704 hrs by Ltn Wilhelm Leusch of *Jasta* 19.

**An LFC veteran with previous service in *escadrille* SPA152 and N471, 2Lt Meredith L Dowd of the 147th Aero Squadron was killed on 26 October by Ltn Wilhelm Leusch of *Jasta* 19 (*Michael Hamaty via Charles Woolley*)**

The 27th had a more promising start, with Denny Holden shooting down a Hannover over Fontaine at 0640 hrs. At 1433 hrs, however, the 94th lost its second-ranking ace when Coolidge was killed over Chevières.

'Coolidge, with his usual loyalty, was hurrying to the assistance of a formation of American bombers, which, after dropping their eggs on the enemy town of Grand Pré, were in turn attacked by a large number of swifter flying Fokker machines', Rickenbacker recalled ruefully.

'The Archie shells were directed at the bombers and not at the SPAD of Ham Coolidge! After having scornfully passed through hundreds of barrages which were aimed at him, our unlucky ace had collided with a shell not at all intended for him!'

Rickenbacker was dodging flak on the other side of Grandpré at 1450 hrs when American-built DH 4s and Breguet 14B2s of the 1st Day Bombardment Group, on a strike against the German facility of Briquenay, came under attack by JG II. As he watched the running fight, Rickenbacker saw a Fokker latch onto his tail. 'With one backward loop

I had reversed our positions and had my nose on his tail', he wrote. 'One short burst from both my guns and he tumbled through space to crash a few miles within the German lines'.

As the bombers passed into Allied territory, Rickenbacker noticed DH 4s of the 11th Aero Squadron beset by 12 Fokkers of *Jasta* 19 when 1Lt Donald C Malcom dropped out of formation with his engine failing and his observer, 2Lt Lew W Springer, wounded in the shoulder. A lone Fokker followed the descending bomber, evidently hoping to force the Americans down as prisoners while Rickenbacker slipped up from behind.

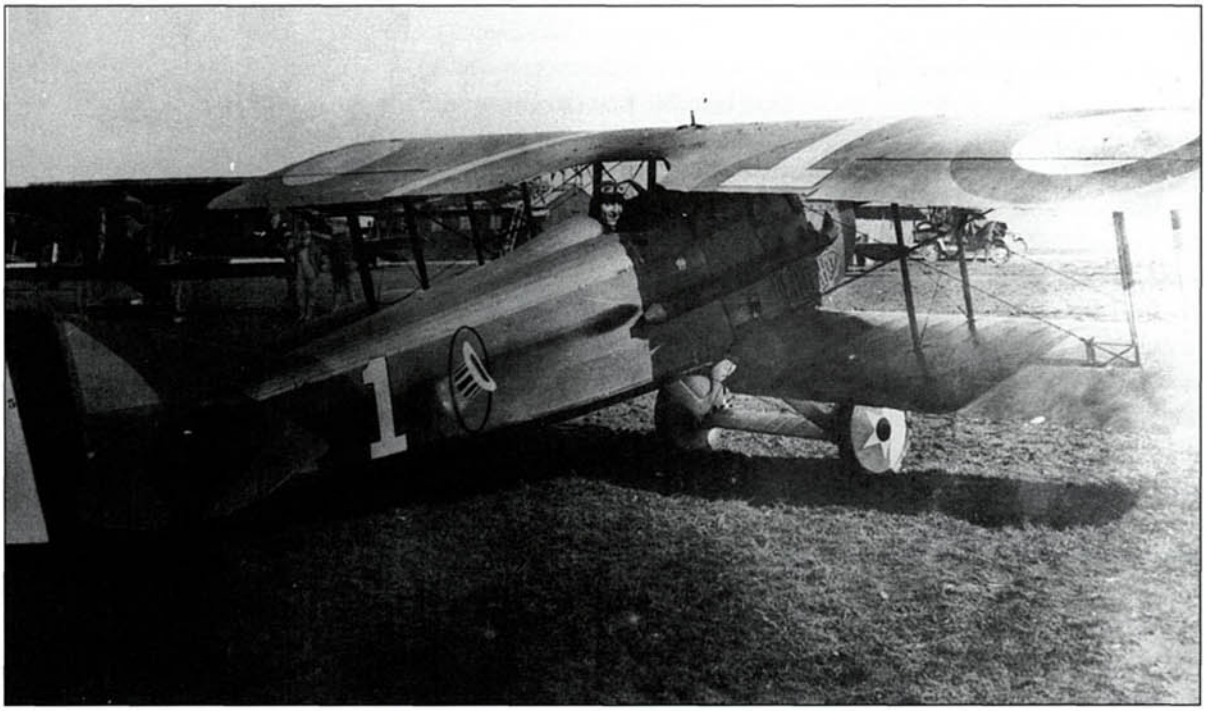
Suddenly the Fokker went into a climb that Rick strove to follow, only to see his opponent stall at the top of the loop, his engine dead. As the German fell into a tail slip and tried to glide down, Rickenbacker kept heading him off and firing a few shots ahead of him until, as he put it, 'The Boche pilot was convinced that I had the upper hand, and he was gliding along in the proper direction with admirable docility'.

Rickenbacker was looking forward to forcing 'his' Fokker down in a field behind Allied lines and flying it the next day when another SPAD suddenly appeared and attacked it. Rick intervened and signalled the other SPAD, whose markings he could not identify, to fly off, but the damage was done. Forced to turn right to evade its fire, the German lost too much altitude to make the field and instead just cleared the Bois de Moncy before coming down hard on rough terrain and crashing to pieces.

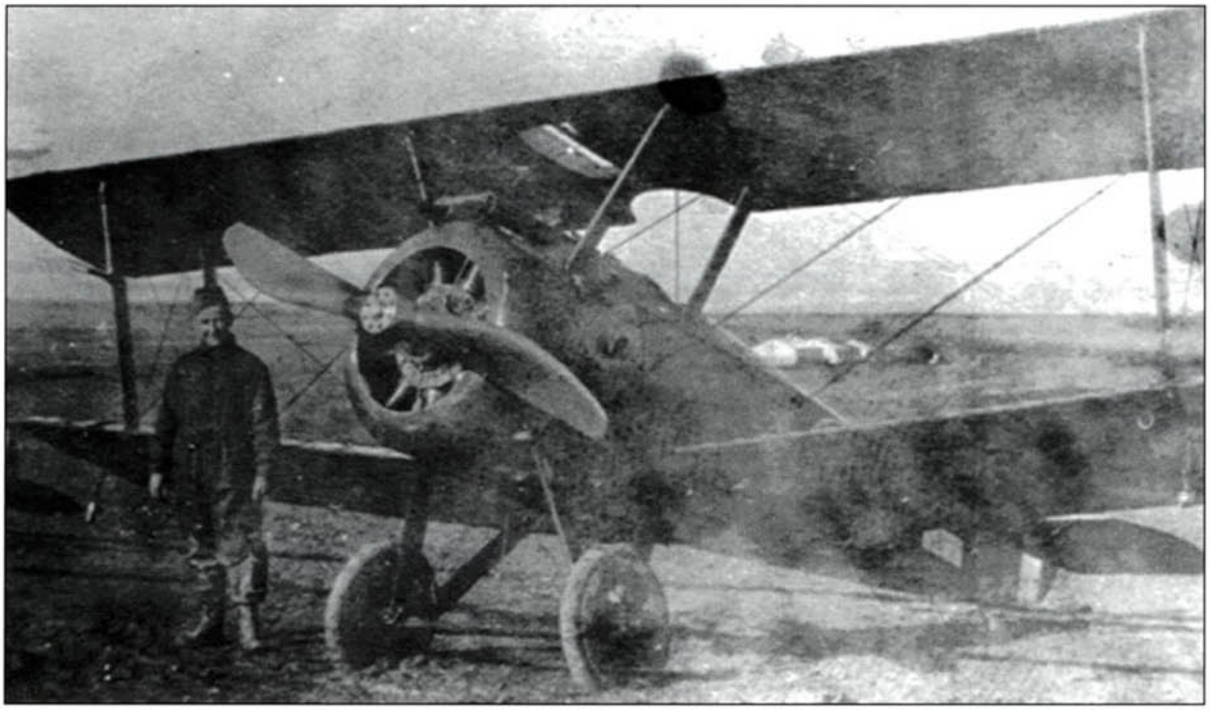
Rick was relieved when the enemy pilot, Lt d R Max Kliefoth, emerged from the wreckage and waved to him while an officer on horseback and some 'Doughboys' came up to take him prisoner. Rick waved back, but remarked, 'Inwardly I was furious with him, myself and most especially with the wretched pilot of the unknown SPAD'.

Hamilton Coolidge was posthumously awarded the DSC as well as the French *Croix de Guerre* with Palm, but he was not the 1st Pursuit Group's only loss that day, as the 185th Aero Squadron also suffered its first. At

**Promoted to captain on 3 October, Hamilton Coolidge scored three victories that same day. Ten days later his tally reached eight. On 27 October he was dead, struck in mid-air by an anti-aircraft shell that had not been aimed at him (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



**Capt Rickenbacker in his 'Old No 1', SPAD S4523, with the shortened exhaust tips installed later in its career. Dating this photograph as having been taken in late October are the captured Fokker D VII and Hannover CL IIIa in the background (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



A groundcrewman poses beside a Gnome-powered Camel of the 185th Aero Squadron, showing the underwing Holt flares that caused 1Lt George W Ewing's death on the night of 27 October (*Lafayette Foundation*)

1730 hrs 1Lt George C Waters returned from a 20-minute patrol of the Verdun area, reporting a problematic ground fog. In spite of that, a subsequent alert sent Kelton and Ewing skyward at 2016 hrs to patrol Verdun and Clermont-en-Argonne, respectively.

They returned less than an hour later, but at 2106 hrs Ewing, his nocturnal visibility impaired by the ground fog, crashed half-a-mile southwest of the aerodrome and he was unable to extricate himself when the still-burning underwing Holt flares set his Camel afire. A horrified mechanic of the neighbouring 27th, Sgt Walter S Williams, recorded Ewing's tragic fate in his diary – 'Burns to death while his screams can be heard miles away'.

Jimmy Meissner scored the only success for 28 October, when he destroyed a balloon at Bantheville at 1556 hrs. The next day began with 2Lt Kaye of the 94th downing a Fokker near St Georges for his fourth victory at 0852 hrs, but 1Lt Eugene L McCubbin of the 27th had a forced landing at Gegonicourt. During a fight between elements of the 94th and 147th and *Jasta* 62 that afternoon, the 'Hat-in-the Ring' squadron suffered its last fatality when 1Lt Edward G Garnsey was shot down by Ltn Näther over Exermont at 1655 hrs.

At the same time Meissner claimed a Fokker whose pilot may have survived, but it was confirmed as his eighth, and final, victory nevertheless. The 185th, which had been strafing German ground forces between its nocturnal patrols, carried out two evening missions to eliminate a *Drachen* at Germont, but both failed to locate the target.

Action flared up all over the Argonne front on 30 October, with all squadrons of the 1st Pursuit involved. Cook of the 94th started things off at 0830 hrs when he attacked three LVGs over Romagne, and in spite of having to clear several gun jams, he brought one down in flames for his seventh victory. This feat resulted in him being awarded an Oak Leaf to his DSC.

During a sortie by the 147th, 1Lt Healy became separated from his flight, and while flying at an altitude of 600 metres, he encountered a Halberstadt some 800 metres above Grandpré. He attacked and sent it diving earthward at 1100 hrs. He then got into a 15-minute fight with its two Fokker escorts, although he managed to outmanoeuvre them, shot one down and drove the other D VII off. Healy returned with his fuel tank virtually dry, his actions having earned him his fifth victory, and the DSC. Although his fighter opponents remain unidentified, his two-seater claim coincides with the death of Fl Abt (A) 295b observer Gefr Wilhelm Klopfer, whose pilot, Flgr Jakob Sauderbeck, died of his injuries the following day.

At 1242 hrs 1Lts Joseph F Gwinn Jnr and Forest G Voeks of the 27th were attacked by six Fokkers near Bantheville. Gwinn landed with his aeroplane badly shot up and Voeks crashed at the aerodrome, badly injuring himself. They were apparently credited to Ltn Becker and Vzfw Otto Klaiber of *Jasta* 12.

Denny Holden scored again over Germont at 1305 hrs. 'Burned another balloon', he wrote home. 'It was asleep in its bed tied close on the ground – that makes three officially and one unofficial, so four in all. Two more officially and I am an Ace!'

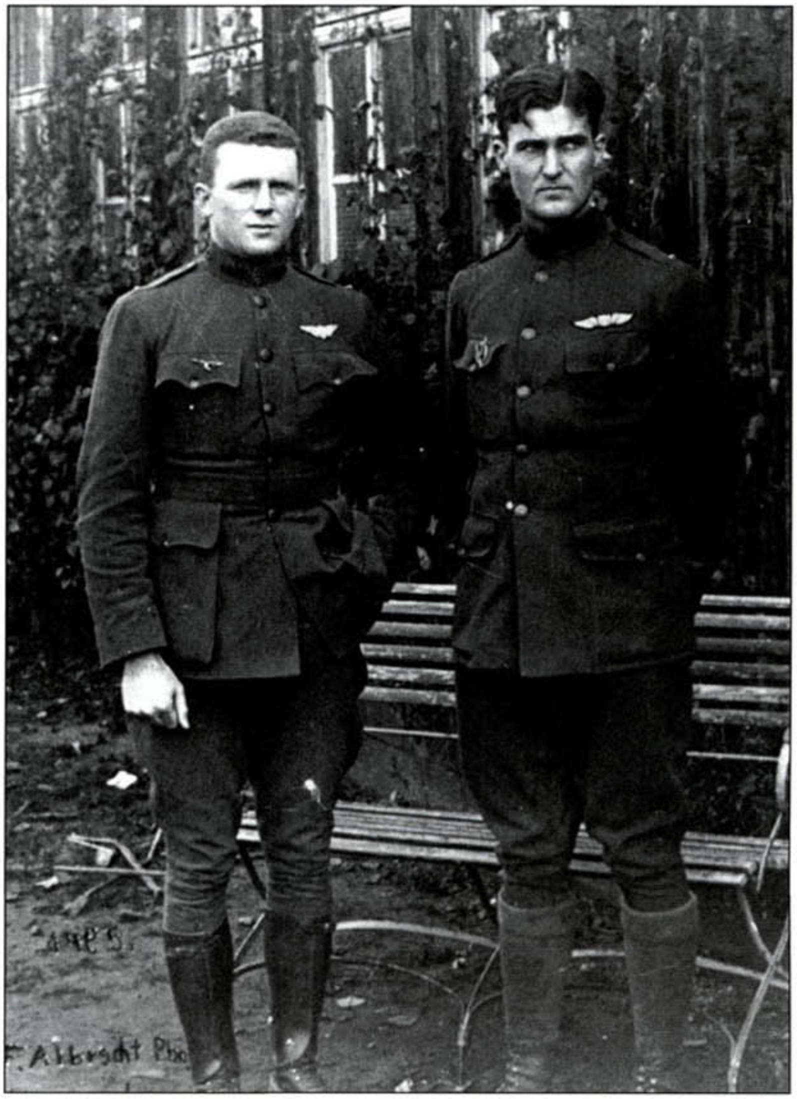
Eugene McCubbin went missing from a 27th patrol between 1530 hrs and 1645 hrs, possibly becoming Vzfw Klaiber's second victory of the day, and sixth overall. McCubbin subsequently turned up in American lines, however, and duly reported back at Rembercourt at 1000 hrs the following morning.

At 1615 hrs 1Lts Percival T Gates and Elihu Kelton of the 185th set out to find the balloon they had failed to destroy the previous night. Gates returned 45 minutes later, but Kelton, who had gone off alone to seek out a balloon at Villers-devant-Dun, did not rejoin the squadron until a month later, after the Armistice, whereupon he described what had become of him;

'After I had proceeded into enemy territory for about ten kilometres, I saw an enemy Fokker. Attacking it, I fired about 70 rounds. Then I zummed over the Fokker to come down on his tail. He immediately zummed and hung on his propeller, firing a few shots which crippled my motor. I then dove and fired about 20 more shots at the Fokker. This dive carried me below him, and of course as I had no motor I could not regain altitude. I was at about 6000 ft. The Fokker, diving on me fired several bursts that shot away my elevator controls. I had little choice but to start a series of downward spins.'

All that time the other Fokkers had followed Kelton down, and he came out of the last spin under a hail of bullets. 'I tipped my Camel over on one wing and crashed that way', Kelton said. 'Aside from a few scratches, bruises, the excitement of the fall and then the crash, I was alright. My opponent had landed a few hundred yards from me because my last shots had knocked out two of his cylinders'.

Taken prisoner near Briére Ferme, Kelton added that his captors gave him a cup of wine and two cigarettes, and asked in English when he thought the war would be over. The only unfriendly note came from Ltn 'Beppo' Grassman of *Jasta* 10', to whom he was credited as his ninth victory. 'He seemed intensely peeved at first that I had spoiled the motor



**1Lt Elihu H Kelton (left) of the 185th stands glumly beside a fellow inmate of Karlsruhe prison after being brought down by Ltn Justus Grassmann of *Jasta* 10 on 30 October. He rejoined the squadron exactly one month later (*Elihu Kelton via Alan Toelle*)**

in his Fokker and forced him to land', Kelton remarked. 'He asked why I had attacked him'.

Accompanying a late afternoon 94th patrol led by Sammy Kaye, who he had put in charge of Chambers' flight, Rickenbacker saw two Fokkers slip up to attack the two rearmost SPADs, severing a strut on 2Lt Raymond W Evitt's machine, but failing to disrupt the formation as Kaye turned it south for home. Although too far above and behind to intervene, Rick followed the Fokkers as they retired toward their lines, and then ambushed them near St Juvin at 1635 hrs, sending one down to crash.

Continuing on, he found a balloon nest at Remonville, dived and set the *Drachen* on fire. At that point Rickenbacker noticed that darkness had set in and he had been flying for two hours and ten minutes – about the limit of his SPAD's endurance.

Heading south, he just barely glided in for a safe landing at Rembercourt. Chastening as the experience had been, Rick's luck had held, and his score now stood at 26, making him the undisputed American 'ace of aces'. Besides the Medal of Honor yet to come, he was awarded the DSC with nine Oak Leaf Clusters and the *Croix de Guerre* with three Palms, and was also made a *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*.

Rickenbacker went to Paris on leave on the 31st. Meanwhile, 1Lt Palmer added one more to the 94th's victory tally when he caught a Halberstadt 150 metres over the Forêt de Boult and shot it down at 0905 hrs. 1Lt Roger Rowland scored one for the 27th too (a Rumpler near Cunel), but the rest of the day went less well for the squadron. 1Lt Sidney W White was ferrying over a new SPAD when he was attacked, possibly by Ltn Ulrich Neckel of *Jasta* 6. White's aeroplane crashed and burned, and he succumbed to his injuries the following day. He was the 1st Pursuit Group's last fatality of the war.

## BREAKTHROUGH

The 1st Pursuit began November 1918 with bombing attacks by the 185th Aero Squadron on German troops in the woods at Dun-sur-Meuse and on the bridge at Sassey-sur-Meuse. The group committed all available aircraft from its other four squadrons, along with those of the 2nd and 3rd Pursuit Groups, to escort strikes by the 1st Day Bombardment Group against enemy targets in Bois-de-Faye and Bois-de-Barricourt at 0715 hrs.

Buzancy fell to the Americans the next day, and the German defence at last began to collapse. In spite of foul weather, the 1st Pursuit Group continued its bomber escort duties, while the 185th's Camels bombed the bridge at Surrey-sur-Meuse at 0525 hrs. At 1120 hrs the 27th's 1Lt McCubbin became separated from his patrol in a rainstorm, and while making his way back happened upon a German balloon ascending near Lechesne. He promptly attacked and destroyed this fortuitous target of opportunity for his first, and only, victory.

At 1615 hrs on 3 November Holden destroyed another *Drachen* at Allemont, writing about it the next evening;

'Last night I dodged over the clouds and burned the balloon just as the observer jumped. Poor devil, the whole burning mass of balloon must have fallen on his parachute. I am getting this job down pretty fine now. The balloon burned after one burst of 30 shots.'

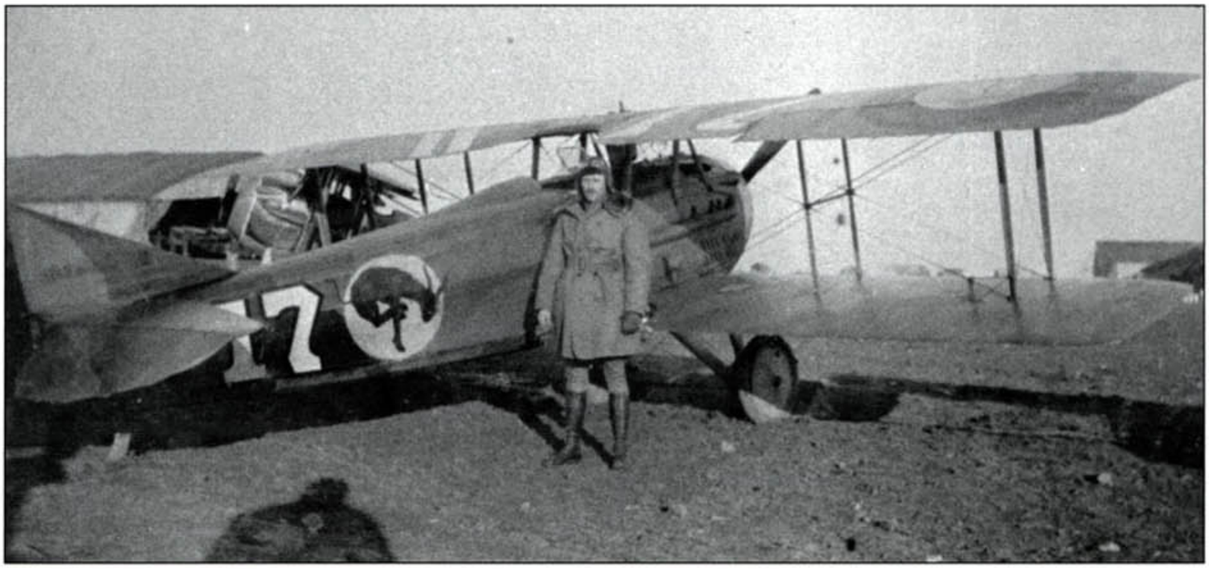
Holden had more reason to celebrate on the 4th;

'At last! At last! I am an Ace, and one over! I burned another balloon last night and one tonight. Tonight, Al Weatherhead, Sumner Sewall and I went over – they were to protect me. I went down and burned mine. They saw another and burned that also – pretty good party?'

That action at St Jean de Buzy at 1612 hrs earned Holden his seventh victory, and an Oak Leaf to his DFC. Sewall and Weatherhead were also credited with eliminating the *Drachen* at Boinville.

During a 13-aeroplane patrol that departed at 1500 hrs that same day, the 27th logged Colton and Lyman returning with engine trouble at 1540 hrs, but at 1545 hrs 1Lts Dawson and Rowland and 2Lt Frederick W Bailey destroyed a Rumpler over Cléry-le-Petit. Bilderback and Rowland returned from a subsequent patrol at 2030 hrs, again with engine trouble.

On 5 November 'B' Flight of the 95th flew a dawn patrol from Verdun to protect the American balloon line, but it ended up attacking the enemy's. At 0625 hrs Sewall burned a *Drachen* over Hannonville for his seventh victory, and 1Lt Herbert R Hall destroyed another near Charney. Two Chicagoans in the 95th, 1Lts Josiah J Pegues and William H H Vail, lost their formation over Dun-sur-Meuse, and while trying to rejoin it came upon eight Fokker D VIIs besetting four SPADs of the 2nd Pursuit



**1Lt Josiah J Pegues with his Blériot-built SPAD of 'B' Flight, 95th Aero Squadron. Pegues was credited with a Fokker D VII on 5 November 1918 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

Group. They dove through the enemy formation, with Pegues bringing down the leader.

At 1025 hrs 1Lt Lennon of the 27th attacked a Rumpler, hitting its observer and sending it down to crash near Charney. Lyman, however, force-landed three kilometres north of the aerodrome and Bilderback reported another mishap of his own;

'Started on "A" Flight patrol at 1500 hrs. Motor ran well until about 1600 hrs, when turning at 2100 revs it suddenly grabbed and prop stopped instantly. I was flying at 500 metres and had no choice of landing place – landed in shell holes, and machine is a total washout. I brought back the clock and altimeter.'

By that time the AEF had finally achieved its breakthrough in the Argonne. While the German 5. *Armee* retreated, however, JGs I and II, turning deaf ears to rumours of collapse along the front and at home, remained defiantly full of fight. Two pilots of the 27th were forced to land after tangling with Fokkers, 1Lt Harry H Harkins at Ville-sur-Cousance and 1Lt Lyman at Souilly. They may have been the SPADs claimed northeast of Sivry at 1130 hrs by Ltns Grassmann and Heldmann of *Jasta* 10, which were among the last three victories logged by JG I. 1Lt Stewart embarked on a balloon strafe at 1445 hrs, but heavy fog forced him to return at 1540 hrs.

The 95th chalked up another victory when 1Lt Meredith J Roberts downed a Fokker near Stenay, but suffered its last casualty in the same area soon after. Flying a volunteer two-man patrol that afternoon, 1Lts Pegues and Vail came upon a German two-seater, but as they dived on it Vail glanced up to see nine Fokkers descending on them. In a letter written to the son of former squadronmate Charles Woolley more than 52 years later, Vail explained;

'I then had three options: to go with Pegues and let the outnumbering enemy strike us from above; to put my nose down and retreat with every ounce of speed in my SPAD (something we both should have done had Pegues been aware of the overwhelming odds about to reach us in seconds); or pull up the nose of my SPAD and meet the nine down-diving enemy aeroplanes head on.'

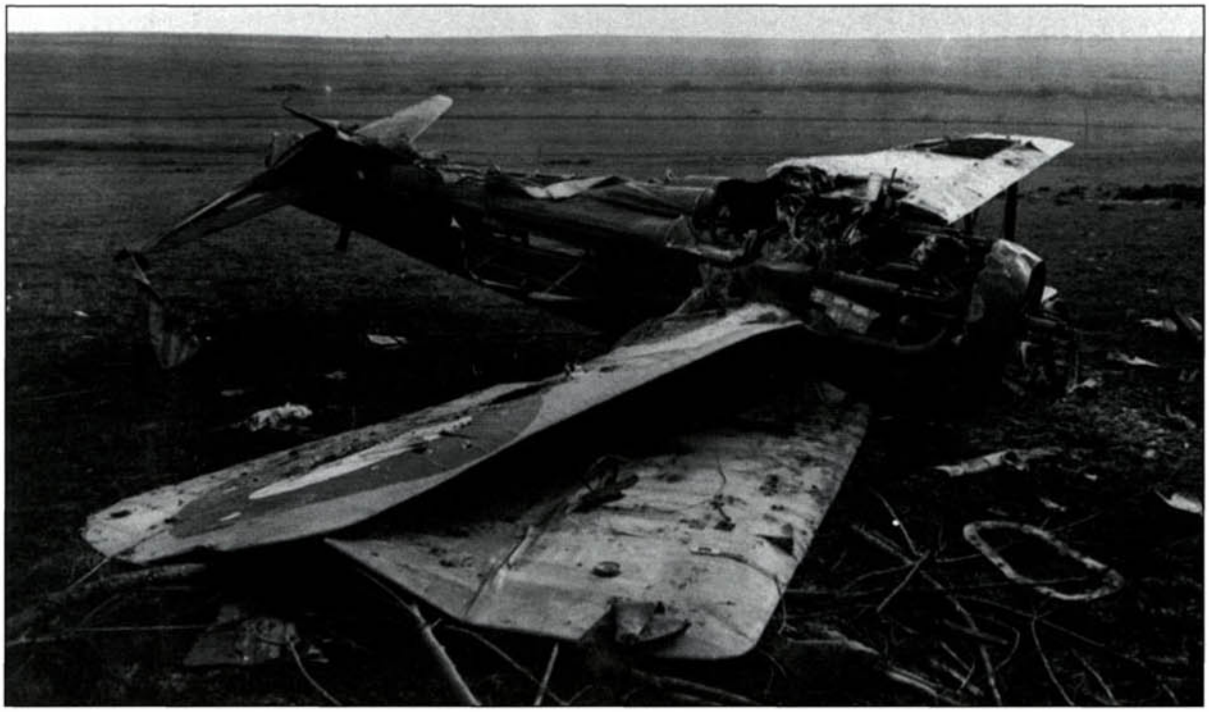
**1Lts William H H Vail (left) of the 95th Aero Squadron with two friends from the 2nd Pursuit Group, namely Hugh L Fontaine of the 49th and John C Bennett of the 139th**

Vail chose the third course, engaging the first four Fokkers. Pegues fought his way out and subsequently shared official credit with Vail for downing one of their antagonists. Vail was about clear of the fight himself when the other five Fokkers joined in. One hit his engine, and Vail wrote;

'My left foot simply dropped off the rudder bar as the burst of machine gun fire tore out the bones of my leg above the left knee. I then attempted a diversionary effort from the enemy aeroplane's gunfire as I came toward the earth with a dead engine and a dead stick. I operated the aeroplane with one foot – my right on the rudder bar in the foot clip with which I could pull back for left rudder, since my left foot was gone. My SPAD was riddled with gunshots. The wing wires were cut and one engine panel strut was shot out in front of my face.'

On several occasions Vail pulled out of his dives to turn and fire on his tormentors until he suddenly realised he had run out of altitude. 'I pulled up, but it was too late and went into the earth practically in a vertical dive', he wrote. 'Having no engine power and the soft mud of France there in the Argonne saved me from death'.

Vail was pinned under a wing and his engine, but a 'Doughboy' managed to lift them long enough for him to pull himself clear with his only remaining mobile limb, his right leg. It was 14 hours before he was brought to Mobile Hospital No 1, where his left foot was amputated, a bullet removed from his arm and his slightly fractured skull bandaged.



**Vail's SPAD after the action on 6 November in which he was severely wounded, and for which he was recommended for the Medal of Honor, but only got the DFC (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

*Jasta* 19's Vzfw Richard Schneider was credited with shooting Vail down near Stenay at 1625 hrs German time, while Ltn Leusch claimed Pegues, but was rightly denied confirmation. They were JG II's last victories of the war. Bill Vail was recommended for the Medal of Honor for his actions, but only received the DFC.

Also on the 6th, Capt Seth Low was transferred from the 185th Aero Squadron for staff duties. Lt Col Harney appointed Capt Jerry Vasconcells to command the 185th thereafter.

**Capt Jerry Vasconcells and 1Lt Donald Hudson, both six-victory aces of the 27th Aero Squadron, pose before a Camel of the 185th, to which Vasconcells was transferred and placed in command on 6 November 1918 (*Michael Hamaty via Charles Woolley*)**

## LAST DAYS

On 7 November American troops occupied the east bank of the Meuse opposite Sedan. The next day saw some of the newer pilots open their accounts, as 2Lt DeWitt of the 94th destroyed an balloon near Olley at 1005 hrs, 1Lt Leslie B Cooper of the 27th burned another east of Stenay at 1225 hrs and his squadronmates 1Lts Lyman, Joseph M Gwinn Jnr and Corliss C Moseley drove down a Rumpler with a white tail and dark camouflage east of Vionville at 1505 hrs.

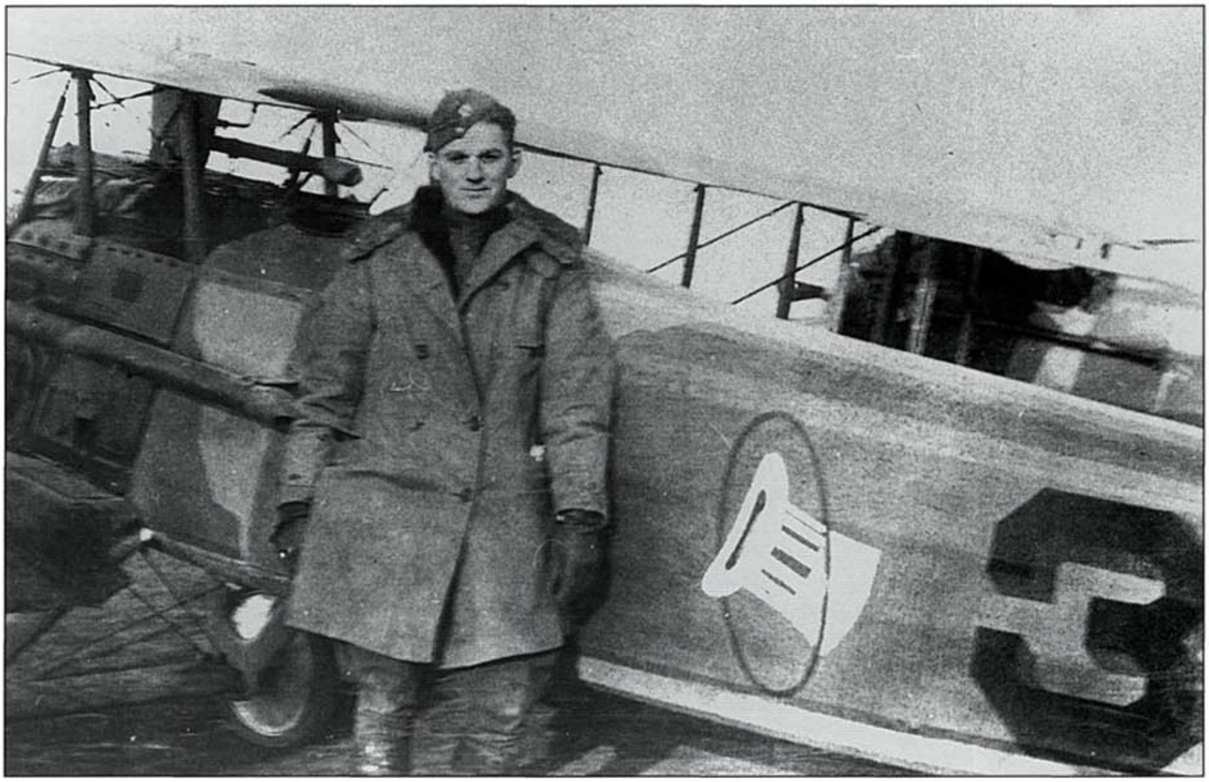
In the 95th, Al Weatherhead destroyed two balloons near Stenay, while 2Lt Elmer G Rhenstrom was credited with two Pfalz and Knowles downed a Fokker at 1537 hrs for his ace-making fifth victory.

1Lts Sumner Sewall and Ted Curtis beside Jim Knowles' SPAD S15150 'White 5'. Knowles scored his fifth victory on 8 November. The next day, Sewall and Curtis helped capture a Fokker D VII under unusual circumstances (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

Rain and fog throughout 9 November caused two different outcomes for the 1st Pursuit Group. Rickenbacker, who had returned from leave on the 5th, was persuaded to let two eager newcomers in former LFC pilot Capt Cedric Fauntleroy and US Army Maj Maxwell Kirby go after an enemy balloon reported at the Meuse, accompanied by the more experienced DeWitt and Cook. None of them returned, and Rickenbacker's guilt over his decision was heightened when rumours came in late that afternoon of an American SPAD colliding with a French aeroplane near Beaumont.

Meanwhile, at the group's advance field at Verdun, Sumner Sewall – destined to be Maine's state senator during the 1930s, and its governor

Maj Maxwell Kirby in the cockpit of SPAD S16546, which was assigned to him on 5 November. Note that the fighter's serial has been stamped into the side of the fuselage aft of the cockpit (*Greg VanWyngarden*)

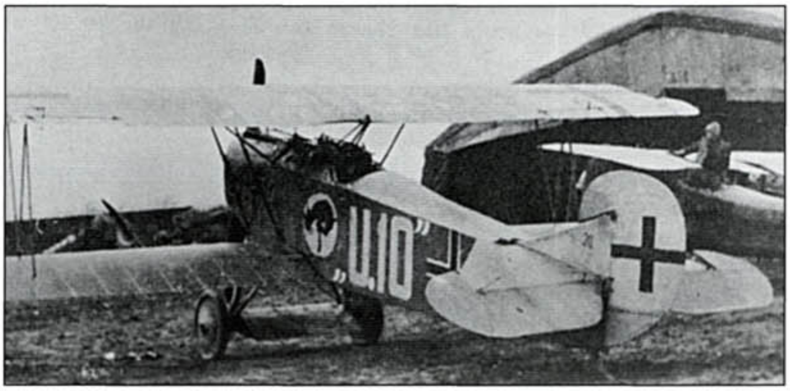


**A former LFC pilot with the French, Capt Cedric Fauntleroy also co-founded the Koskiuszko *Eskadra* – an all-American volunteer unit aiding the Poles against the Bolsheviks in 1920 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

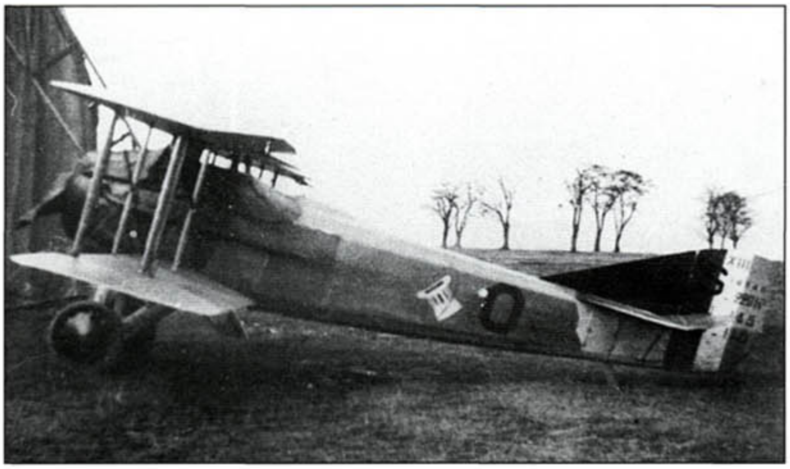
from 1941 to 1945 – along with Ted Curtis and Alex McLanahan were waiting on standby when they saw a Fokker come in for a landing. The three 95th officers ran up with pistols drawn to capture the German pilot, who claimed to have become disoriented in the fog and mistook the American airfield for his own, but philosophically remarked that the war was nearly over anyway.

Ltn Heinz von Beaulieu-Marconnay of *Jasta* 65 may in fact have been influenced to 'become lost' by the death on 26 October of his brother, *Jasta* 19 commander and 25-victory ace Ltn Oliver von Beaulieu-Marconnay, some ten days after allegedly being shot in error by one of his own *Staffel* mates in the heat of a dogfight. Beaulieu-Marconnay's Fokker D VII 4635/18 has since been restored for display at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

On 10 November the Americans secured the bridge at Stenay. The Meuse-Argonne campaign was all but over, having cost the AEF 26,227 dead and 122,063 wounded, while the Germans had lost 28,000 men



**Fokker D VII 4625/18 in which Ltn Heinz von Beaulieu-Marconnay of *Jasta* 65 landed, ostensibly in error, at the Verdun airstrip on 9 November. The aircraft sports the 95th Aero Squadron insignia, along with Beaulieu's personal marking inspired by his former unit, the 10th Uhlans. *Jasta* 65 markings consisted of a dark grey fuselage with brown cowling and tail (*Jon Guttman*)**



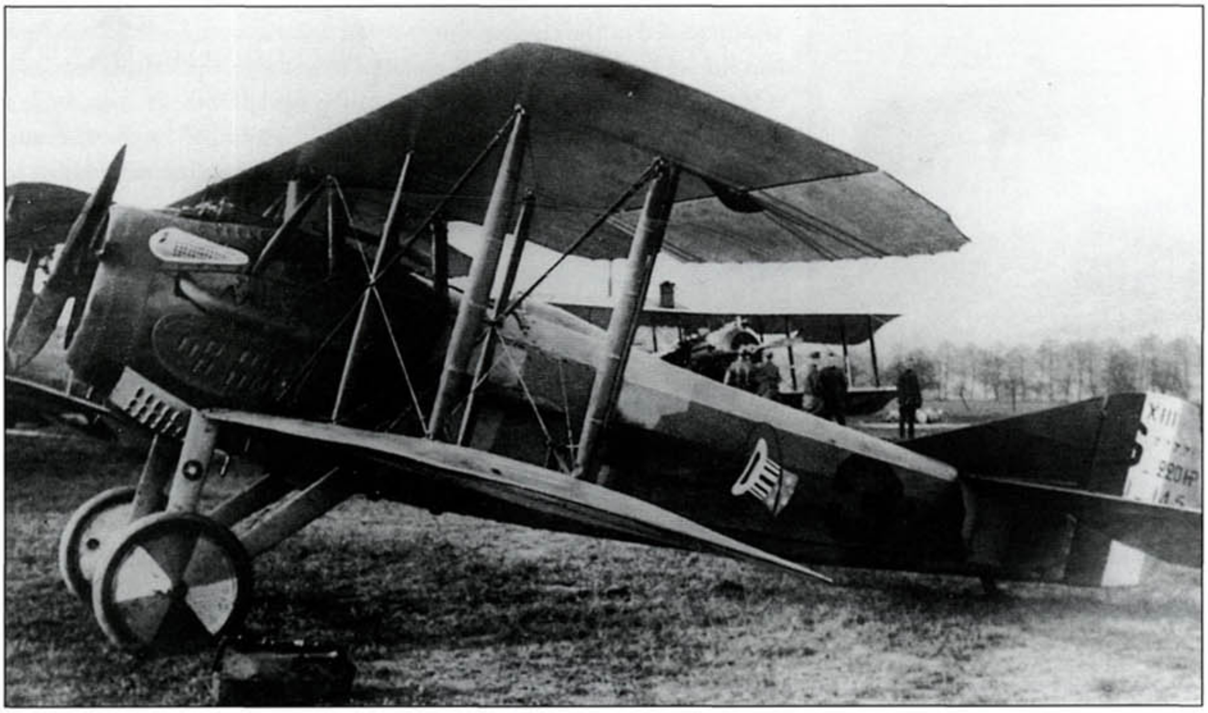
**Maj Kirby's SPAD S16546 'Black 0' in which he scored the 94th Aero Squadron's (and the 1st Pursuit Group's) last aerial victory on 10 November 1918. When Capt Chambers took over command of the 94th from Rickenbacker, he also got S16546, which was subsequently shipped to Poland for its nascent air force in 1919 (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**

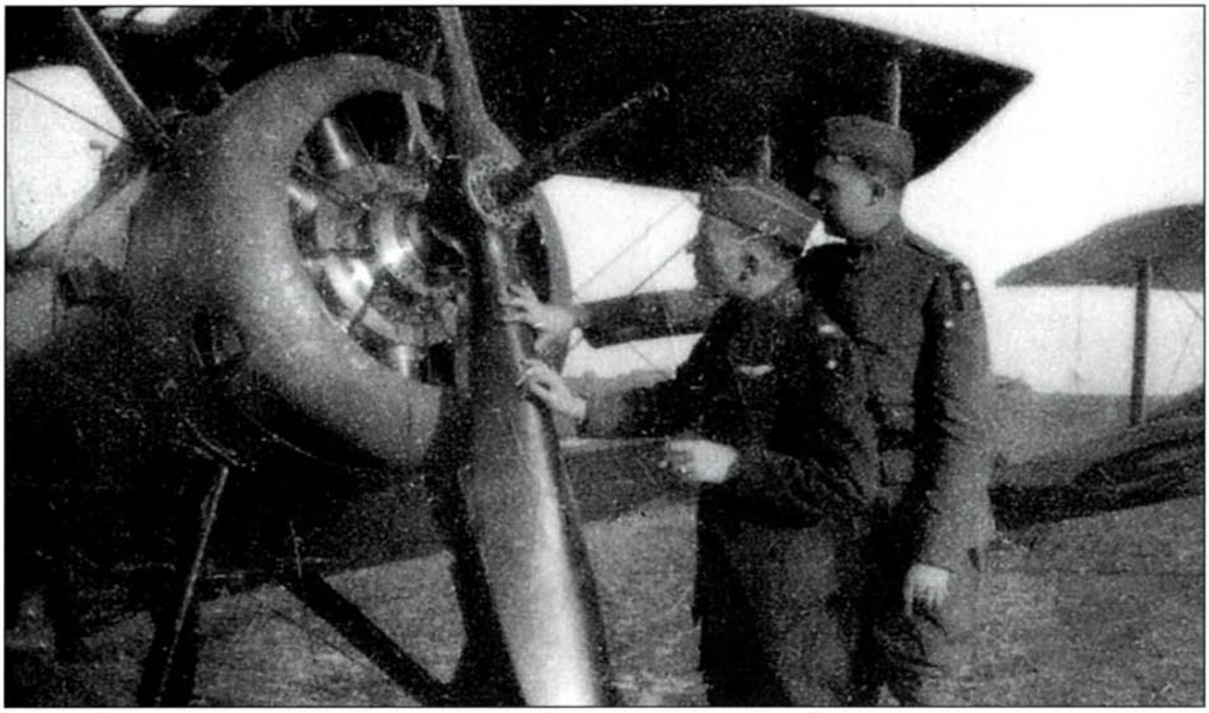
killed and 120,250 wounded. At noon that day Rickenbacker joined the 95th's contingent at Verdun to discover, to his immeasurable relief, Fauntleroy's SPAD.

Fauntleroy had landed there the night before, and DeWitt had crash-landed but was unhurt, and would rejoin the squadron later that day. Cook had had a harder time of it – he found the *Drachen*, but its machine gunners drove him off with a shattered propeller. Cook force-landed between the lines and dashed for the trenches, covered by American infantry fire, just as German artillery demolished his SPAD.

For a final bit of good news, Rick learned that Maj Kirby had landed at another aerodrome at 1040 hrs that morning after having scored the 94th's – and the 1st Pursuit Group's – last aerial victory of the war. 'He had become lost the night before and had landed on the first field he saw', Rickenbacker wrote. 'Not realising the importance of telephoning us to tell us he was safe, he took off early the next morning to come home. This time he got lost in the fog which surrounded our district.

**Also participating in – and belatedly returning from – the 94th's last patrol was SPAD S7777, flown by Capt Cedric Fauntleroy. The aircraft featured red, white and blue segmented wheel hubs, a red cowl, white cam covers that were each adorned with a blue 'eye' and an American cockade on the front landing gear leg (*Jon Guttman*)**





**First Army officers examine a Camel with a 35 mm single-shot cannon (firing a canister of 16 mm lead balls) that was briefly test flown by the 185th Aero Squadron after the Armistice. The experimental gun was found to have a maximum effective range of about 50 metres (*Alan Toelle*)**

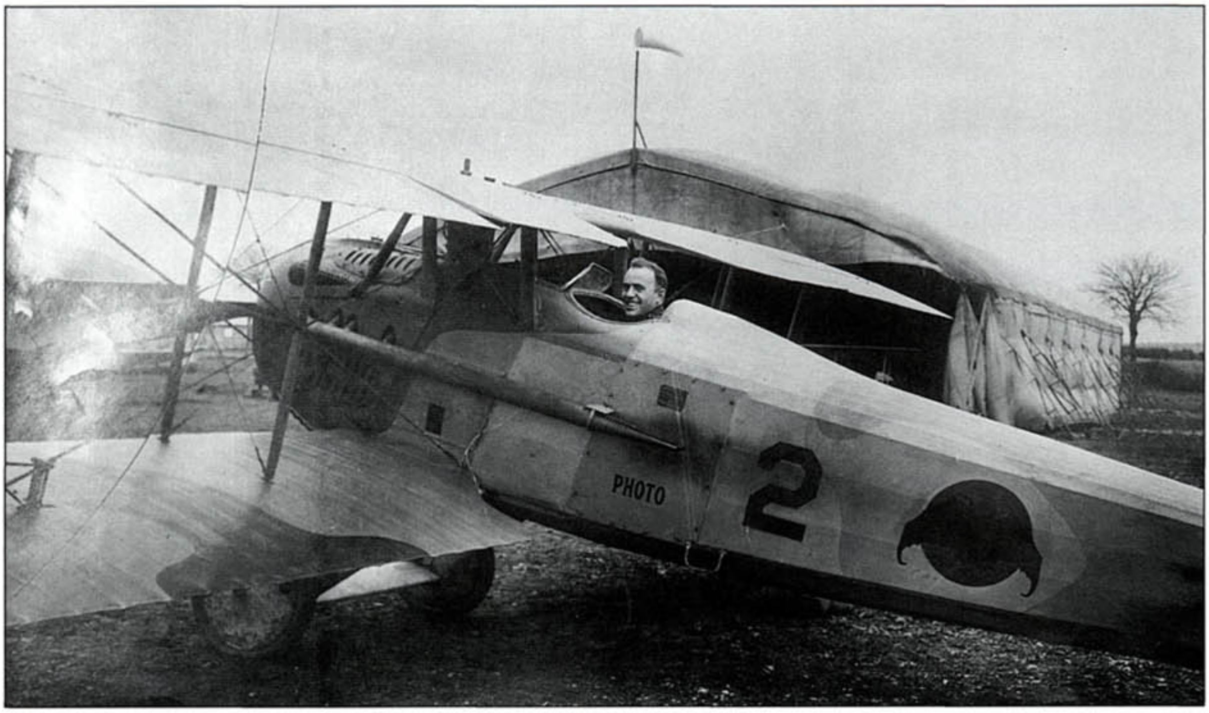
'When he again emerged into clear air he found he was over Étain, a small town just north of Verdun. And there, flying almost alongside his SPAD, was another aeroplane, which a second glance informed him was an enemy Fokker! Both pilots were so surprised for a moment that they simply gazed at each other. The Fokker pilot recovered his senses first and began a dive toward earth. Maj Kirby immediately banked on his tail and followed him down to within 50 ft of the ground, firing all the way. The Fokker crashed head-on, and Kirby zoomed up just in time to avoid the same fate.'

On 11 November the Armistice came into effect, and the 1st Pursuit Group joined in the celebrations. Its effectiveness in the past few months had shown how the group had matured in combat, and consequently its record was the best in the AEF. The group's pilots were credited with a total of 203 victories (70 by the 94th, 54 by the 27th, 48 by the 95th and 31 by the 147th), for the loss of 36 pilots killed in action, three killed in accidents, 17 captured and one interned in Switzerland.

The group's achievements may also be measured by the fact that it had done more than 'Fight the Flying Circus', to paraphrase Rickenbacker – at one time or another, it had crossed machine gun sights with all three 'circuses', JGs I, II and III, and came to hold its own against all of them.

On 19 November the group departed for Noërs (which its pilots called 'Nowheres'). There, the boredom of peacetime duties amidst the damp cold of approaching winter led

**The sole Camel retained by the 185th after the Armistice was 'Black 12', see here in March 1919. In April it was overpainted white, and details of the 'Bat' insignia likewise picked out in that colour (*Elihu Kelton via Alan Toelle*)**

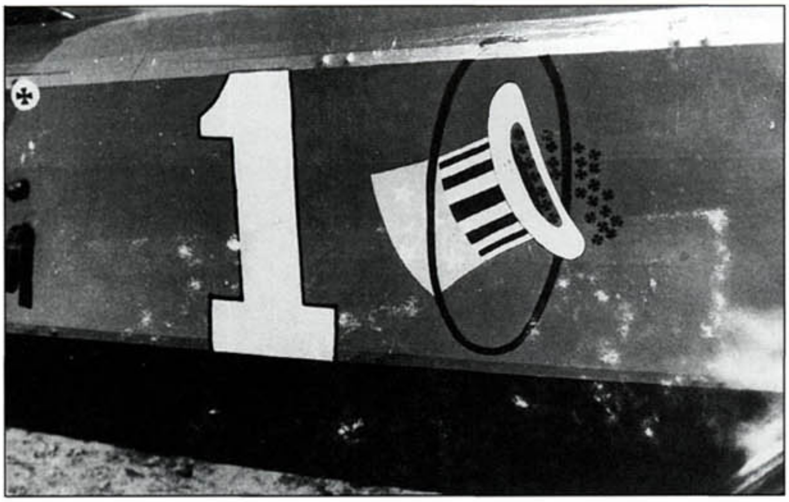


pilots of the 94th to ask Capt Rickenbacker if – seeing as the exigencies of war no longer existed – they could take some creative liberties with the paint finishes of their aeroplanes. 'I don't care how you paint them', Rick replied.

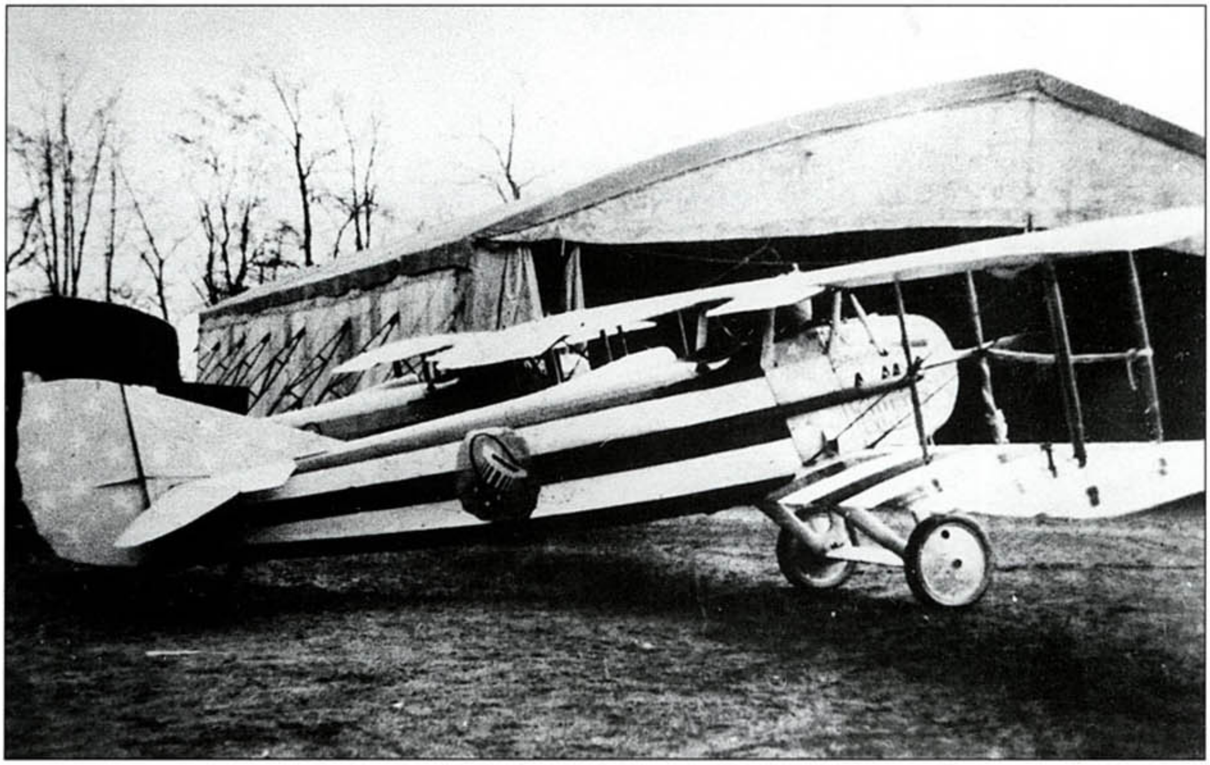
On 9 December the 1st Pursuit moved to Colombey-les-Belles. On the 26th Rickenbacker, Meissner and Campbell were called back home for a Victory Bond drive, leaving Capt Reed Chambers in command of the 94th. Soon after that the pilots completed their projects, resulting in a bevy of flamboyant SPADs that outdid their late German adversaries. Passed on to the 138th after the 94th was sent home, the colourful SPADs made a lasting impression as participants in the AEF's 3rd Army Air Service Carnival at Koblenz, in Germany, on 23-27 April 1919.

Demobilised at the end of the year, the 1st Pursuit Group was reconstituted at Selfridge Field, Michigan, on 10 June 1919. In May 1941 it was reorganised around three squadrons, the 27th, 71st and 94th.

**After the war, the 185th replaced its Camels with SPAD XIIIs. Capt Vasconcells smiles from the cockpit of Blériot-built S18805, assigned to 'A' Flight leader 1Lt Arthur S Truscott on 12 February 1919 and crashed by 1Lt Esme S Rosaire on 29 March. The unit's bat insignia was black on an orange disc, the number '2' in orange outlined in black and the cowling black and orange fore-to-aft (*Greg VanWyngarden*)**



**After the Armistice, Rickenbacker's SPAD S4523 had a fresh squadron insignia painted on, with 25 crosses spilling out of the hat. A 26th was confirmed when Capt James Norman Hall returned from captivity (*US Air Force Museum via Greg VanWyngarden*)**

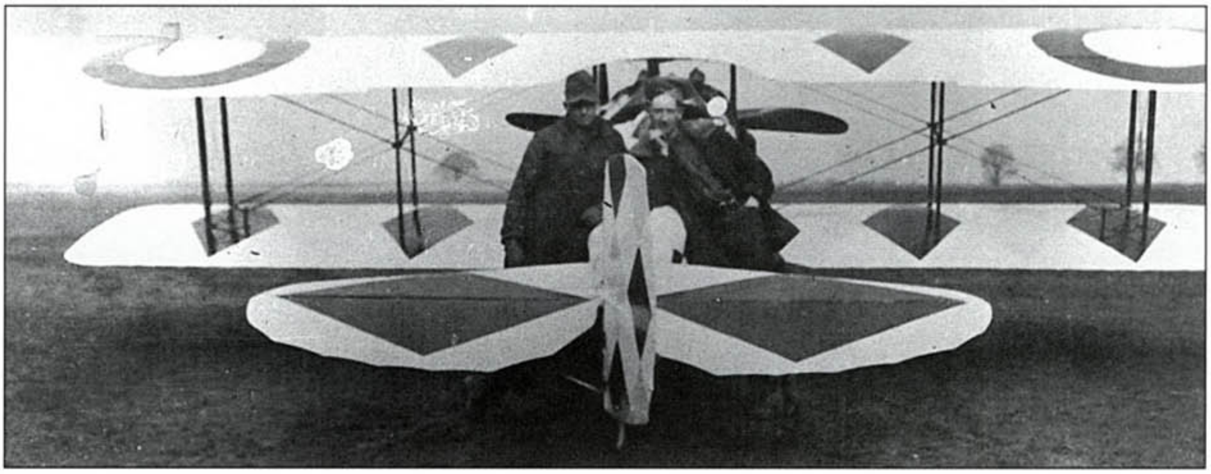


**Given tacit consent by Rickenbacker, many of the 94th's pilots painted their mounts in flamboyant schemes. Reed Chambers' S16546 was given an 'American flag' treatment in red, white and blue. He cut off the squadron insignia for a souvenir when it was passed on to the 138th Aero Squadron, which otherwise retained the American flag motif (*USAF Museum via Jon Guttman*)**

**1Lt William W Palmer's mechanics pose with 'Diamond Dick', as they called his SPAD after they overpainted it white with red and blue diamonds (*USAF Museum via Jon Guttman*)**

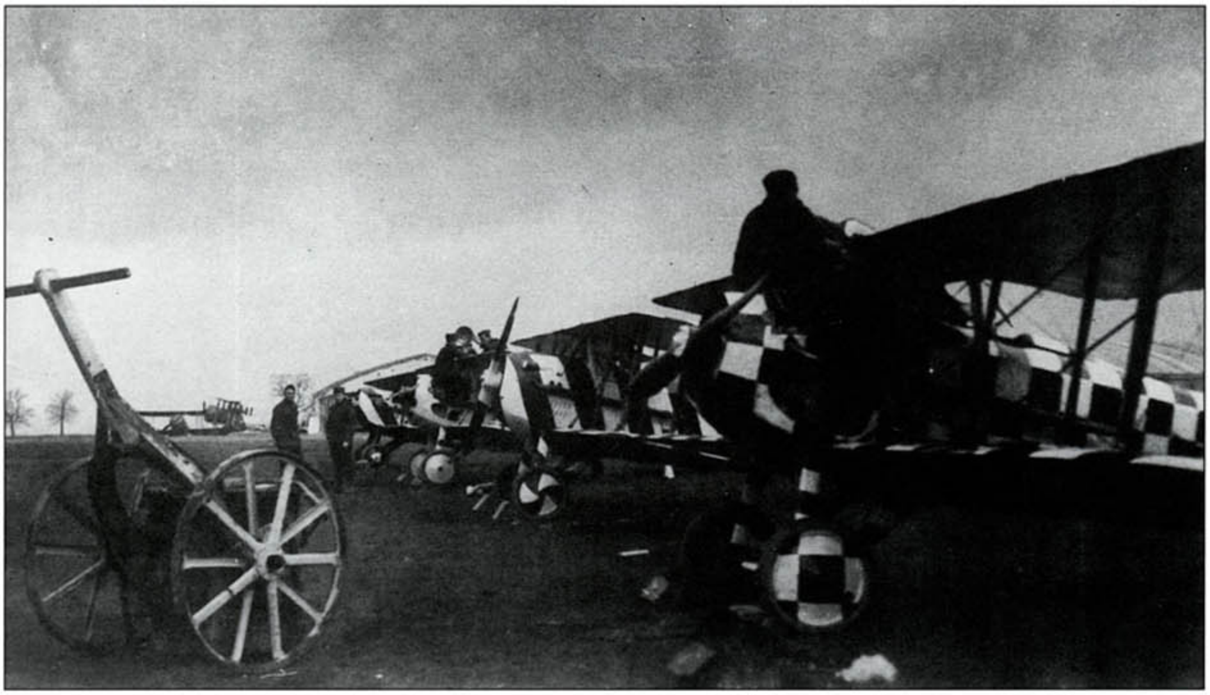
Equipped with Lockheed P-38 Lightnings, the 1st Fighter Group, as it came to be redesignated, entered World War 2 when it departed for England and assignment to the Eighth Air Force on 25 April 1942. From there it went to serve over North Africa and Italy with the Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces. By the end of the war the group had been credited with downing 402.5 enemy aeroplanes for the loss of 171 P-38s, 102 pilots killed in action, four missing and 35 as PoWs. While in Italy the group scored yet another first in 1945, when it received the first Lockheed P-80 jet fighters to see operational wartime service.

Deactivated in 1961, the 1st Pursuit returned on 1 October 1991 as the 1st Operations Group of the 1st Fighter Wing. Currently equipped with F-15 Eagle and F-22 Raptor fighters, the historic unit remains committed to upholding the long tradition behind its motto, *Aut vincere aut mori* ('Conquer or Die').



1Lt Robert W Donaldson, who scored one victory with the 94th, chats with an officer in front of his black and white chequered SPAD (*USAF Museum via Jon Guttman*)

Bequeathed to the 138th Aero Squadron after the 1st Pursuit Group was disbanded, the 94th Aero Squadron's colourful SPADs took part in the 3rd Army Air Service Carnival at Koblenz, in Germany, on 23-27 April 1919 (*USAF Museum via Jon Guttman*)

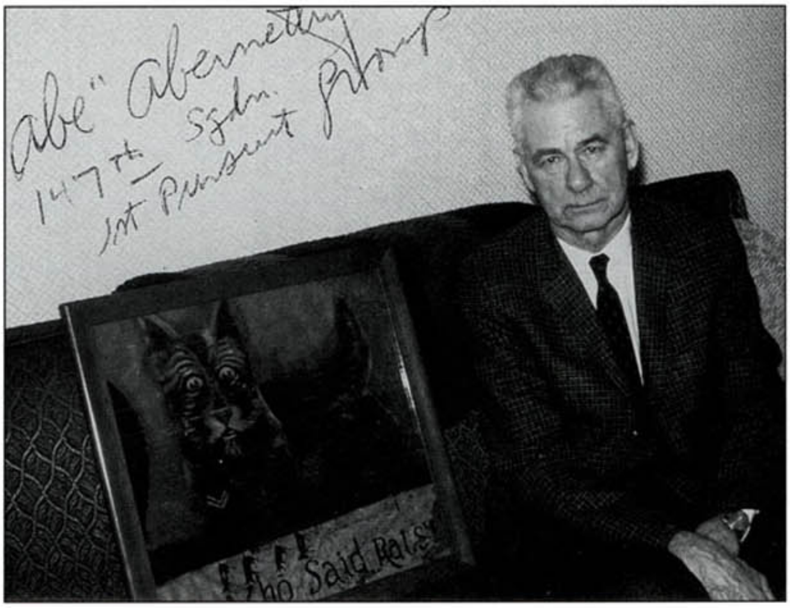


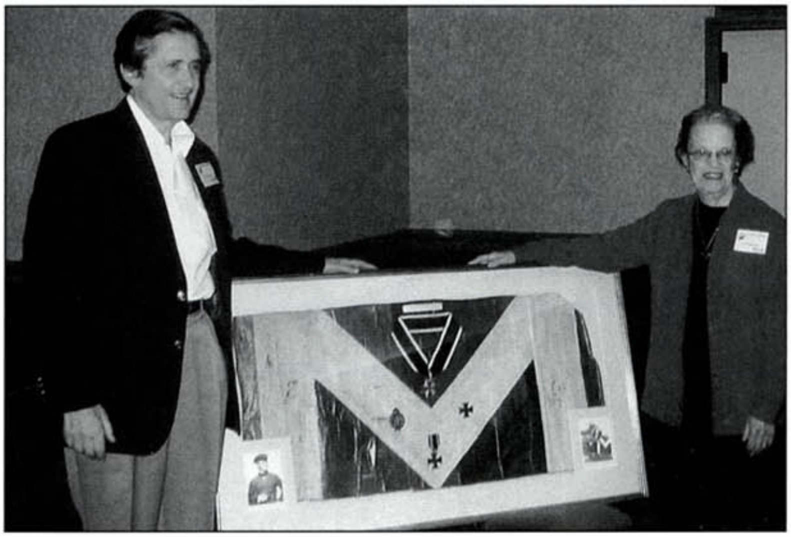
**Right: Thomas J Abernethy in 1978, with the 147th Aero Squadron insignia that he cut from his SPAD 'White 3'. He added a fourth dead rat to denote his unofficial claim of 15 July 1918, and said that the wound stripes were added to the terrier each time his aeroplane was hit (*J Abernethy via J Guttman*)**

**Middle right: During their last international reunion in Paris in November 1981, five World War 1 aces admire a new painting by Roy Grinnell depicting Douglas Campbell's fifth victory. Standing, from left to right, are Ken Porter, George A Vaughn Jnr (No 84 Sqn RAF, 17th Aero Squadron USAS, 13 victories) and Canadian William M Thompson (No 20 Sqn RAF, 26 victories). Seated from, left to right, are Arthur Raymond Brooks (22nd Aero Squadron, six victories) and Douglas Campbell (*J Guttman*)**

**Below: Another reunion of sorts at the Paris gathering was between former enemies Aloys Heldmann of *Jasta* 10 (15 victories) and Ken Porter of the 147th Aero Squadron, whose paths had crossed over Château Thierry and the Argonne (*J Guttman*)**

**Below right: During a seminar of the League of World War 1 Aviation Historians in Roslyn, Virginia, on 11 May 2007, Bette Avery Applegate, daughter of Walter L Avery, met Karl Menckhoff's son, Gerhard Menckhoff, and 'gave him back' the section Avery had cut from Menckhoff's Fokker D VII on 25 July 1918 (*J Guttman*)**





# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### 1st PURSUIT GROUP ACES

| Name | Squadron(s) | Victories with 1st PG | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|
| Edward V Rickenbacker | 94th | 26 | 26 |
| Frank Luke Jnr | 27th | 18 | 18 |
| Gervais Raoul Lufbery | 94th | 0 | 16 |
| Hamilton Coolidge | 94th | 8 | 8 |
| James A Meissner | 94th & 147th | 8 | 8 |
| Wilbert W White | 147th | 8 | 8 |
| Reed McK Chambers | 94th | 7 | 7 |
| Harvey W Cook | 94th | 7 | 7 |
| Lansing C Holden | 95th | 7 | 7 |
| David McK Peterson | 94th & 95th | 6 | 7 |
| Sumner Sewall | 95th | 7 | 7 |
| Douglas Campbell | 94th | 6 | 6 |
| Edward P Curtis | 95th | 6 | 6 |
| Donald Hudson | 27th | 6 | 6 |
| Jerry C Vasconcells | 27th | 6 | 6 |
| John A Healy | 147th | 5 | 5 |
| James C Knowles Jnr | 95th | 5 | 5 |
| John K MacArthur | 27th | 5 | 5 |
| Ralph A O'Neill | 147th | 5 | 5 |
| Kenneth L Porter | 147th | 5 | 5 |
| Francis M Simonds | 147th | 5 | 5 |

# COLOUR PLATES

**Author's Note**
Artist Harry Dempsey has created the colour profiles for this volume, working closely with the author to portray the aircraft as accurately as circumstances permit. Some of the illustrations are, admittedly, reconstructions based on fragmentary photographic evidence or descriptions provided by the pilots while they were alive, combined with known unit marking policies.

## 1

**Nieuport 28 N6234 of 1Lt Edward B Elliott, 27th Aero Squadron, Touquin, August 1918**
Photographed in full 27th livery, including the black and white chequered squadron band on the upper and lower left wings, N6334 was fated to enjoy only a brief career. Edward Elliott was killed in it during one of the 1st Pursuit Group's opening encounters with *Jagdgeschwader* I – aka the 'Flying Circus' – on 2 July 1918.

## 2

**Nieuport 28 N6296 of 1Lt Fred W Norton, 27th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**
An All-American collegiate football star before the war, 1Lt Fred Norton shared credit for two Fokker D VIIs destroyed on 2 July 1918, but was mortally wounded on the 20th. His last words before his death on the 23rd ('Twenty-seventh – more power to you') became the squadron motto.

## 3

**Nieuport 28 N6157 of 1Lt William J Hoover, 27th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**
Some 27th pilots added unofficial personal markings to their aeroplanes, such as Bill Hoover's *"Becky"*, in which he shared in those first two Fokkers downed on 2 July with Fred Norton. N6157 was shipped out for salvage on 28 July 1918, but Hoover managed to survive the Château Thierry ordeal, and the war, with a third success scored in a SPAD on 27 September.

## 4

**Nieuport 28 N6164 of 1Lt Douglas Campbell, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, April 1918**
A patched-up survivor of the 31 March hangar fire at Villeneuve-des-Vertus, N6164 had just had the 94th Aero Squadron's 'Hat-in-the-Ring' squadron insignia and its red and black triangle cowling motif applied when Doug Campbell used it to score the first aerial victory by an American-trained USAS pilot on 14 April 1918. The 'White 10' was added to the fuselage sides and upper right wing in white and the underside in black after this success, and the aeroplane was subsequently condemned on 4 May and shipped to Colombey-les-Belles two days later.

## 5

**Nieuport 28 N6184 of 2Lt Alan F Winslow, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, April 1918**
A former LFC pilot with previous service in *escadrille* N152, Alan Winslow was at the controls of N6184, which bore the legend *Priscilla* under the cockpit, when he scored his first victory alongside Doug Campbell on 14 April 1918. He would down one more enemy aeroplane before being shot down himself on 31 July 1918 and enduring a harrowing captivity.

## 6

**Nieuport 28 N6144 of 1Lt James A Meissner, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**
Transferred from the 95th, N6144 originally bore a red or black '14' bordered in white on its fuselage sides, before getting a large white '8'. The fighter's cowling, decorated with a silver and red lightning bolt pattern, was also replaced later in its career, which encompassed four victories and surviving two occasions when the upper wing fabric tore away.

## 7

**Nieuport 28 N6159 of 1Lt Edward V Rickenbacker, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**
After scoring his first two successes in N6159 on 29 April and 7 May, 1Lt Rickenbacker painted the fighter's cowling 'B' Flight white and plastered Third Liberty Loan posters on its wings.

## 8

**Nieuport 28 N6158 of 1Lt Douglas Campbell, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, June 1918**
Unfortunately, only the squadron insignia from this historic aeroplane has been preserved, so its markings have had to be provisionally reconstructed from unit records and descriptions. Received from the 95th at Epiez on 21 April 1918, N6158 wore the number 'White 10' until 7 May, when it was changed to 'White 0'. Capt David Peterson scored victories flying it on 3 and 15 May, and Campbell took it over thereafter, although when the author interviewed him he was not positive as to whether he had had his red and black cowling markings applied to it. In any case, he scored victories in it on 18, 19, 27 and 31 May, and 5 June, making N6158 the most successful Nieuport 28 of the war. On the latter date Campbell had been wounded and the fighter damaged – the patching and repainting shown in this profile covers the damage incurred that day. The aeroplane was subsequently flown by 1Lt Hamilton Coolidge on 18, 19 and 20 June and finally wrecked in a landing accident by 1Lt William W Chalmers on 21 June. A salvaged scrap of fabric from N6158, which bears the unit insignia, can still be seen in California's San Diego Air and Space Museum.

## 9

**Nieuport 28 N6169 of Maj John W F M Huffer, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**
Received from the 95th on 15 March, N6169 bore the markings of squadron commander Maj Huffer until 3 June, but it was frequently flown by Rickenbacker, who stripped its fabric in the process of scoring his third victory on 17 May. Repaired overnight, N6169 went on to figure in Rick's successes of 22, 28 and 30 May. At some point the innermost section of the propeller was painted white to 'disappear' within the white cowling centre whilst spinning.

## 10

**Nieuport 28 N6178 of 2Lt Philip W Davis, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**

A former LFC pilot, Philip W Davis normally flew N6178, but on 19 May 1918 Maj G Raoul Lufbery, whose regular Nieuport N6193 ('White 2') needed servicing after a patrol he had flown earlier that morning, took off in N6178 to attack a Rumpler two-seater – a combat that ultimately cost 'Luf' his life. Ironically, Davis was flying Lufbery's N6193 when he was killed in action on 2 June by Ltn Friedrich Hengst of *Jasta* 64w.

## 11

**Nieuport 28 N6181 of 1Lt William F Loomis, 94th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, May 1918**

Another of the 94th's LFC alumni, Bill Loomis had previously flown with *escadrille* SPA153. A former 95th machine, Nieuport N6181 bore the red (or possibly black) number '15' and cowling stripes in red and white in a symmetrical, not spiral, pattern. The fighter was later flown by 1Lt William W Chalmers, who was brought down wounded and captured on 7 July 1918.

## 12

**Nieuport 28 N6150 of 1Lt Edward P Curtis, 95th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, June 1918**

A provisional reconstruction based on interviews with 'Ted' Curtis, this Nieuport has 'A' Flight's cowling marking, which Curtis and squadronmate Charles H Woolley recalled as having taken the form of red and white diamonds. Curtis later flew SPAD S7614 with the number '4' as well, although it was also flown by 1Lts James C Knowles Jnr and Angerau G Heinsohn Jnr too. Four of Curtis' five victories (two in Nieuports) were shared with 95th and even 94th Aero Squadron pilots.

## 13

**Nieuport 28 N6160 of 1Lt Waldo H Heinrichs, 95th Aero Squadron, Gengoult, June 1918**

In addition to the red and gold spiral-striped cowling of 'B' Flight, 1Lt Heinrichs' aeroplane had its serial applied within the blue rudder band and had a small personal device added below the starboard headrest. On 2 June 1918 Heinrichs experienced the Nieuport 28's penchant for shedding wing fabric when the canvas on his left upper wing tore away during a power dive. He made it back safely, however, and scored additional victories on 5 and 25 July, but was subsequently shot down and severely wounded on 17 September and forced to endure a harrowing captivity.

## 14

**Nieuport 28 N6177 of 1Lt Quentin Roosevelt, 95th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**

When 1Lt William H Taylor was injured in a crash on 25 June, 1Lt Quentin Roosevelt was put in charge of 'C' Flight and apparently flew a replacement for Taylor's Nieuport 'Black 14', which had had the name '*Hope*' (after a nurse with whom he had become enamoured) painted beneath the left side of the cockpit. The 'Black 14' shown here was photographed at the end of June, after the 95th had moved from Gengoult to Touquin, and displayed a white triangle on the fuselage upper decking – presumably asymmetrical – as used on some French SPADs to throw off a pursuing enemy's aim. Also unlike Taylor's, which had a black '14' on the right upper wing, this aeroplane had a large, bold white '14' on the left upper wing as well. Roosevelt was credited with a Fokker destroyed on 10 July 1918, but was killed four days later when shot down by Uffz Carl Emil Gräper of *Jasta* 50.

## 15

**Nieuport 28 N6145 of 2Lt Ralph A O'Neill, 147th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**

As leader of 'B' Flight, O'Neill's Nieuport had blue wheel hubs and cowling, and he added an early 'sharksmouth' to the latter. The 147th Aero Squadron did not adopt a wing band, but its Nieuports uniquely had the flight letter on the left upper wing, with the pilot's number on the right. O'Neill scored four of his five accredited victories in this Nieuport during July 1918.

## 16

**Nieuport 28 N6256 of 1Lt Kenneth L Porter, 147th Aero Squadron, Touquin, July 1918**

Some of the aircraft of 2Lt Wilbert W White's 'C' Flight had smaller squadron insignias, probably to compensate for the oversized personal numbers that preceded them. Ken Porter's aeroplane, with large, bold numbers on the fuselage (as well as 'C-15' on the upper wing) clearly exemplified this. Porter's first aerial success (a share in the destruction of a Fokker D VII) came in this Nieuport on 2 July 1918.

## 17

**Nieuport 28 N6334 of 2Lt William E Brotherton, 147th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**

As with Porter, Brotherton also had a large number (in this case '16') applied to the fuselage of his 'C' Flight aeroplane, along with an unidentified dark, white-outlined elliptical marking below the right cabane struts. He also added a black snake to his white cowling, emerging from the right upper vent. Later flying SPAD XIIIs S4626 and S8502 'White 26', 'Bedroll' Brotherton scored three victories before being killed on 10 October 1918.

## 18

**Nieuport 28 N6294 of 2Lt Wilbert W White, 147th Aero Squadron, Saints, June 1918**

N6294 was issued to White on 25 June 1918 and preferred by him when the new SPAD XIIIs arrived in mid-July. White was credited with two victories while flying the Nieuport on 24 July, but his next six successes would be scored in SPADs.

## 19

**Nieuport 28 N6199 of 2Lt Thomas J Abernethy, 147th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**

Handicapped by his tall stature within the confines of his cockpit, Abernethy claimed to have 'washed-out' N6258 on 14 May and N6280 on 25 June, and was shot down in N6206 on 15 July. On 18 July he received N6199, and recalled postwar that 'my log book says that on 24 July, Jones, Simonds, C P Porter, Ralph O'Neill and I accounted for two Huns out of a batch of 12'. Abernethy cracked up N6199 on 30 July, but was credited with a share in a third victory on 12 October, to which he added a claim for 15 July as 'My "unofficial one"'.

## 20

**SPAD XIII S15143 of 1Lt Oliver T Beauchamp, 27th Aero Squadron, Saints, August 1918**

Beauchamp's Blériot-built S15143 was one of 12 new SPADs that accompanied six Nieuports on the 27th's fateful patrol of 1 August 1918. Although Beauchamp brought his bullet-riddled aeroplane out of the squadron's run-in with *Jagdgeschwader* I, Maj Hartney recalled, 'Directly over our field his ship went into a spin and he was killed almost at our feet'.

## 21

**SPAD XIII serial unknown of Maj Harold E Hartney, 27th Aero Squadron, Saints, August 1918**

Although bearing the high number 'Black 15', this SPAD was marked in squadron leader's bands and had the 27th's chequerboard wing band pattern applied to its engine cowl, with Hartney in the cockpit. A 27th mechanic stated that the aeroplane also had a 'yin-yang' decoration on the wheel hub, as reconstructed here. On 21 August Hartney was promoted to command of the 1st Pursuit Group, and leadership of the 27th Aero Squadron was passed on to 1Lt Alfred A Grant.

## 22

**SPAD XIII S15202 of 2Lt Frank Luke Jnr, 27th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, September 1918**

The serial seen here is theoretical for this particular machine, by which Luke was photographed at the height of his fame. He allegedly wrote off five SPADs during his two-week balloon-busting spree.

## 23

**SPAD XIII S7984 of 2Lt Frank Luke Jnr, 27th Aero Squadron, Verdun, September 1918**

A new arrival that had not yet had unit or individual markings applied, this was the aeroplane that Luke flew from the 1st Pursuit Group's advance airstrip at Verdun when he brought his short career to its spectacular end on 29 September 1918.

## 24

**SPAD XIII S4523 of 1Lt Edward V Rickenbacker, 94th Aero Squadron, Rememberourt, September 1918**

Depicted here in its original form when issued to Rickenbacker in the summer of 1918, S4523's exhausts acquired shorter tips and small cockade patches covered six bullet holes by mid-October. The aeroplane survived the war to have 25 crosses added to its 'hat', since one of Rick's victories was not confirmed until after Capt James Norman Hall returned from captivity.

## 25

**SPAD XIII S4526 of 1Lt Reed McKinley Chambers, 94th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, September 1918**

Assigned on 28 August 1918, Kellner-built S4526 probably figured in all of Chambers' victories except on 22 October, when he flew Blériot SPAD S15225 'Yellow 6'. S4526 was also flown by 1Lt Edwin R Clark until his reassignment to the 168th Aero Squadron on 13 September.

## 26

**SPAD XIII S15130 of 2Lt Samuel Kaye Jnr, 94th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**

S15130 was assigned to Kaye on 6 September, and he shared his first two victories with 1Lt Reed Chambers some 23 days later. Kaye survived the war with a total of four victories.

## 27

**SPAD XIII S15034 of 1Lt Hamilton Coolidge, 94th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**

Second to Rickenbacker among the 94th's aces with eight victories, Ham Coolidge flew Blériot-built S15034 to score a 'hat trick' on 3 October 1918, but it came back so badly damaged that it had to be replaced, although he cut off the number '22' for a memento. Coolidge was flying S7743 when he was killed on 27 October.

## 28

**SPAD XIII S7777 of Capt Cedric G Fauntleroy, 94th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, November 1918**

Flown by former LFC member Capt Cedric Fauntleroy, S7777 sported an unusually decorative livery at the end of the war, which included 'eyes' on its camshaft covers, tricoloured wheels hubs, a blue and red cowl and a small US Army Air Service cockade on the left front undercarriage leg.

## 29

**SPAD XIII S15150 of 1Lt James C Knowles Jnr, 95th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**

Blériot-built S15150 featured 'A' Flight's red cowl and single white wing band edged in red. One of the 95th Aero Squadron's founder members, Knowles claimed the unit's first SPAD victory – a Fokker D VII – on 25 July, and shared in the destruction of a Rumpler that same day. He went on to down enemy aeroplanes on 4 and 9 October and 8 November.

## 30

**SPAD XIII S4512 of 1Lt Walter L Avery, 95th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**

Issued on 21 July in 95th Aero Squadron livery, but still bearing French national markings, Kellner-built S4512 was the SPAD in which Walter Avery brought down German ace and *Jasta* 72s commander Ltn Karl Menckhoff in his first aerial combat on 25 July.

## 31

**SPAD XIII S7624 of 1Lt Harold R Buckley, 95th Aero Squadron, Saints, July 1918**

Also photographed with French markings and a more circular than elliptical blue background to the 'Kicking Mule' squadron insignia, S7624 probably figured in Buckley's second victory – a Fokker D VII – on 10 August. On 19 September he received SPAD S7644 'White 24', subsequently sharing credit for a balloon on the 26th and two Rumplers on the 27th.

## 32

**SPAD XIII S15123 of 1Lt Lansing C Holden, 95th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**

Holden destroyed a *Drachen* on 29 September, shared a dubious claim for a Fokker D VII with Ted Curtis, followed this up with a substantial balloon kill on 23 October, downed a Hannover on the 27th and went on to burn more balloons on 30 October and 3 and 4 November.

## 33

**SPAD XIII S7671 of 1Lt Sumner Sewall, 95th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**

Ace and future Maine governor Sumner Sewall had the number 'White 0' applied to most of his aircraft, including a Nieuport 28 and this Kellner-built SPAD, which he flew from 26 September to 14 December 1918. He burned balloons on 4 and 5 November whilst flying this fighter, bringing his final tally to seven.

## 34

**SPAD XIII S7588 of 2Lt Wilbert W White Jnr, 147th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**

When the 147th's strength was increased to 25 SPADs and seven aeroplanes per flight, several pilots were allotted higher numerals, Willard White leading 'C' Flight in 'White 21'. White's eighth, and last, victory was a Fokker with which he collided on 10 October. The German, Ltn Wilhelm Kohlbach of *Jasta* 10, bailed out successfully, but White had no parachute.

## 35

**SPAD XIII S4625 of 2Lt Ralph A O'Neill, 147th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**

Taking delivery of S4625 on 23 August 1918, Ralph O'Neill used it to share in downing a Rumpler with Capt Jimmy Meissner and 2Lt George G Waters on 10 October, for his fifth victory.

## 36

**Sopwith F 1 Camel F1430 of 1Lt Elihu H Kelton, 185th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, October 1918**

Reconstructed in standard squadron livery for the time – the 185th's Camels was painted white after the Armistice – F1430 was shot down on 30 October by Ltn Justus Grassmann of *Jasta* 10, although its pilot, 1Lt Elihu Kelton, damaged Grassmann's engine and was out of prison and back with his squadron exactly one month later.

**Back Cover**

**SPAD XIII S15836 of 2Lt Frank Luke Jnr, 27th Aero Squadron, Rembercourt, September 1918**

After more than a month of being viewed as an unruly squadron liability, 2Lt Frank Luke burned a German balloon flying this SPAD on 12 September. Although confirmation was delayed – and his SPAD, riddled with anti-aircraft fire, was a write-off – this first victory started Luke on a dramatic two-week odyssey to glory, death and immortality.

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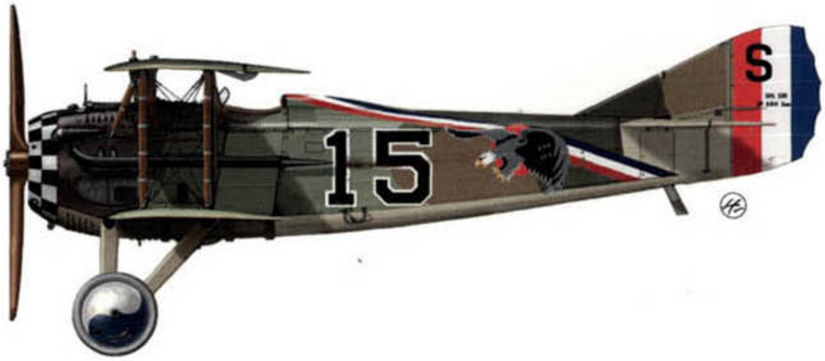

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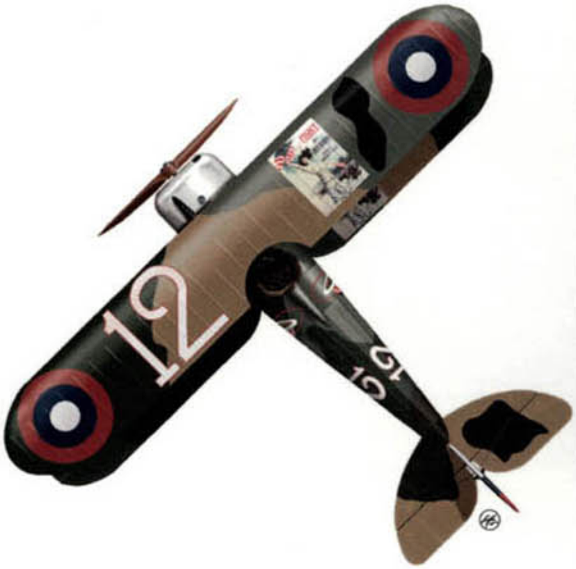

Planforms

Photographs

# USAS 1st Pursuit Group

Starting operations in the Toul sector in March 1918, the 1st Pursuit Group initially flew Nieuport 28s, given to the Americans because the French did not want them. Expanded by the arrival of additional squadrons, the group went to war in earnest over Château Thierry in July, initially suffering heavy losses. Re-equipped with SPAD XIIIs, the 1st achieved fame over St.Mihiel and the Argonne. By the war's end, it had downed more enemy aeroplanes than any other US Group. Discover the history of America's first aces in this book as first-hand accounts, rare photographs and a wide variety of accurate, full-colour profiles reveal their thrilling combat experiences.

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